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A COWBOY CAVALIER



HARRIET C. MORSE

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For Miss Gordon
from one of her many
admirers

The author
Harriet C. Morse,



Tom Mayberry.

A Cowboy Cavalier

*"Wedding is destiny—
and hanging likewise"*

By
HARRIET C. MORSE

Illustrations by
SAMUEL F. B. MORSE, Yale '07
and
JOHN CROSS



THE C. M. CLARK PUBLISHING COMPANY
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS
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THIS BOOK
IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

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A COWBOY CAVALIER.

CHAPTER I.

It was a perfect Fall day filled with brilliant sunshine such as one sees only in Texas; with a dry invigorating air that did not admit of fatigue. The scene was not on the prairie land, but among the low hills near the Colorado river, of which it is said that if a man drinks but a single drop he is compelled sooner or later, no matter how far he wanders, to return to Texas, there to end his days.

The low hills covered with gorgeous green, the broad river and the fields bright with the blossoms of the cacti, gave a fitting background to the figures of two athletic young fellows whose horses had just forded the stream. They came lazily jogging along, the beauty of the scene appealing to them without any actual recognition of the fact. They rode, one foot out of the stirrup, their blue shirts open, neckerchiefs untied,

and broad hats pushed back from their bronzed faces.

"Say, Jay," said the younger of the two, "have you seen the new girl at Luce's? I saw her yesterday, and how anyone so fine could be kin to that crowd passes me. The Honorable Daniel Luce says she has money and belongs to the oldest kind of a family."

"Yes, May," answered James Carruth. "I saw her yesterday on horseback. She can't ride a little bit, acts like she thought the horse would get away with her. She's a right good looker, but I haven't seen her on the ground yet."

"Do you know, Jay," continued Walter Mayberry in a gentle voice, "I have a feeling that I'm going to fall in love with that girl. Jim Crow shot himself last year on account of that red-headed girl of Wilson's. Do you think you could ever get that struck on a woman?"

As his thoughtful eyes met the bold ones of his companion a deep flush crept over his face.

"Lord bless you, no, child!" he answered. "Not so long as there are other women in the world. But when they are all gone it's time to die, sure enough."

"A fellow that's rich and handsome like you are can always get a girl to love him," sighed

the boy, "but a poor ugly cuss like me don't stand any kind of a show."

"'Taint that. Women aren't won by looks, but you're too all-fired bashful. If the girls only knew you as I do they would all be running after you;" and his black eyes softened as he looked into the dreamy blue ones of his youthful companion.

"The fact is, May," he continued, "a girl has got to be frightened into loving you. Treat a woman as you would a horse. Don't let her see she has the upper hand for a moment. I know 'em. Now there's that girl at Luce's.—Gosh! Walt, there she is now, sitting over yonder on the steps of the Viles place. I'll bet she walked over from the ranch. I've heard she was the beatenest woman for frogging it, ever seen here; but she won't hoof it back. I'll take her behind me on my horse."

"Do you know her?" timidly asked Walter.

"No! but you just watch me and see how it is done." Infused with sudden energy he put spurs to his horse and dashed across the open field, scattering the frightened cows, while Walter jogged on, watching him with dreamy interest.

"I believe I could really love that girl," he mused, "and I would be awful good to her; but

there is no show for any one else when Jay is in the running."

As he ended his soliloquy he saw his friend approach the veranda of the house on the steps of which sat the young woman in question, saw her raise her eyes from the book she was reading, then saw Jay merely sweep off his hat in salute and pass on. Alone as he was he broke into an exultant shout, which died away as his friend approached.

"Where's Miss Luce?" he inquired. "I thought she was a pretty big girl, but she is right well hidden behind you."

Jay turned red. "She looked at me so queer, I dassen't speak to her; but you wait, she'll ride behind me yet. Wait and see."

Marian Luce, the object of this conversation, had been musing for some time on the veranda of the deserted ranch house, which had once belonged to the prosperous Viles family. It was the one story, rambling, white adobe style of cottage usual on the Texas ranches, surrounded by an inclosure which fenced it off from the vast stretch of pasture-land on all sides. This inclosure contained a picturesque wind-mill, and numberless rosebushes still in full bloom, the fragrance of which filled the air. Marian herself was graceful and attractive, if not beautiful.

Her tall, finely molded figure and broad shoulders gave her an air of strength and power. As Jay rode up, she sat with her book in her lap, an abstracted look on her face.

"Doesn't seem to see me at all," he mentally cogitated. "Never mind; she must want some beau down here in Texas, and I'm as good as any of them," and sweeping off his large hat he said, "Good-evening," in his softest drawl. She raised her head and returned his salutation with a somewhat surprised expression. Her glance, though kindly, carried no invitation to proceed. Jay, who had fancied he knew how to ingratiate himself with any woman, became suddenly abashed in the presence of what was to him an unknown quantity, passed on, to the great delight of his friend Walter.

Marian remained seated, viewing the prairie before her with a half smile on her face. It seemed like a beautiful picture. She had often dreamed of a land like this, so peaceful and idyllic. "I wonder," she mused, "if this has ever been the scene of a desperate deed such as often took place in the early frontier life. I could almost wish it were not quite so tame now." Then she remembered what the good old dame on the train had said to her:

"Those who say there is no more a wild and

woolly West must have been born and raised west of Denver, and never been East to note the contrast."

A scrap of conversation overheard on the cars came back to her. Two men had been earnestly talking together. The elder was a man who had evidently weathered many a rough season and lived through varied experiences. The younger had an innocent-looking round face, lighted by keen gray eyes. As the train slowed up at Xantus, she overheard the younger one say eagerly, "We shall get them yet."

"Speak lower," cautioned the elder, and the rest was indistinct, but as she now remembered it she had caught the names "Mayberry" and "Carruth." Of that she was quite sure. The names meant nothing to her then, but she had since become familiar with them. Could it be that either of those young men, famous for their aristocratic lineage, their courtly bearing, their beauty and bravery, were implicated in any crime? Oh, no! That could not be. She smiled a little, half coquettishly, as she recalled the vision which had just saluted her so gracefully.

At this juncture she was startled from her reverie by a murmur of voices in the deserted house behind her. She sprang to her feet and listened with breathless expectancy. The voices

ceased but there was an unmistakable rustle. Her knees shook under her, as she turned and glanced across the sea of grass which lay between her and her natural protectors. Since she had discouraged the well-disposed cowboy she must traverse it alone. Once more she glanced at the house, and then nervously gathering up her skirt for unimpeded action she rushed from the place and dashed with all possible speed across the prairie, nor did she slacken her pace until she had left the Viles place far behind.

At last she stopped to look around and seeing no one, she moved more slowly to recover her breath, at the same time endeavoring to reassure herself. "I imagined it all," she thought. "Lacking desperate deeds, I revive them in thought." Just then in the distance she espied what was to all appearances a couple of horsemen approaching from the direction of her uncle's ranch, whereupon her fears returned with redoubled vigor. "Why did I not obey Uncle Dan! Oh, if I were only home in New York!" were some of the thoughts which rushed through her mind.

In the meantime the two equestrians who had been approaching with great rapidity, had appeared in full view. One of them, a Mexican boy

(evidently a servant) was the first to see Marian, and to call the companion's attention to her.

At this, the other, a young man who in a slight degree resembled the first apparition of the afternoon, sprang to the ground and swept off his hat with the same drawling "Good-evening." While he gave the boy a hurried command in his own language, Marian studied him intently. Taller and even more powerfully built than the other, his features as well being more massive and stern, he gave the appearance of strength, both mental and physical,—a man whom one would obey instinctively and trust without question. Two cowboys she had beheld that day, attractive enough to satisfy the longings of the most unreasonable seeker after romance; and two men of such widely different types. The stern bearing of the one would have been a delightful foil for the fascinating, rollicking air of the other.

As his servant galloped off, the man turned half timidly, and half commandingly to Marian, with the remark, "Pardon my freedom, Miss, but this is no place for a woman to be alone. Allow me to attend you until you are in sight of your home. You are from the Luce Ranch, I reckon."

Marian answered him in the affirmative, thanking him for his kind offer which she felt neither

the power nor the inclination to refuse. As they walked on together she was conscious that he would gladly enter into conversation with her, but for fear of giving offense was waiting for her to take the initiative.

"I am sure," she thought, "that the other man would have paid me several pretty compliments by this time, and in true southern style, and—" with a slightly discontented glance at her silent companion—"I am not sure I should not prefer it to this deferential silence." But for fear of grieving the good youth she suggested timidly.

"When I saw you coming, I scarcely knew whether to be relieved or still more frightened."

"Still more frightened? What frightened you before?"

Marian was quite unconscious of the quick look which accompanied this question, and the eagerness with which he listened to her reply. At its completion he remarked lightly,

"Do you feel perfectly safe now?"

"Why, of course."

Marian laughed, and so did her comrade, as he blushed a deep red beneath his tan. This boyish look made his resemblance to the other cowboy more striking, and Marian admitted to herself that he was almost as attractive. In this genial

frame of mind, she reached the outskirts of the Luce Ranch buildings.

"I will say good-bye now," she said, extending her hand. "I thank you most heartily for your kindness."

Her companion blushed again as he took her outstretched hand, while he assured her that to escort her had been a great pleasure, and that he should remain standing there until he saw her inside the house.

"I hope we shall meet again," she suggested archly.

"We are going to meet again," he said simply.

CHAPTER II.

THE home of the Luces was like the Viles place, but built on a much larger scale. To one accustomed to buildings constructed chiefly in the air, it was very delightful to see this wide rambling house which covered nearly as much ground space as a New York block. It was surrounded by broad fields upon which grazed *innumerable* herds of cattle, and in the distance could be seen the winding river, bordered by many trees and the fragrant Algerita bushes. A large pecan tree in front of the house gave a most grateful shade.

Fearing that she was already late for supper, Marian hurried past the tree whose protecting branches had often tempted her, and held her spellbound for hours at a time. She did not venture even to breathe in the delicious odor of the algeritas then in full bloom, but hurried past them all into the house.

The algerita berry is very common in the hilly regions of Texas. The bush on which it grows

resembles in shape and size the currant bush. The berry is red and supposedly edible. The blossom is white, and gives out an odor something like that of the tube rose, but more delicate, and less oppressive. It is however strong enough to pervade the whole atmosphere even out of doors with a faint but very delicious perfume.

"It is a part of this wonderful country to me." Marian had written to her father: "It seems to cast a spell over me like that of a fairy wand, and to hold me here. I am conscious of it everywhere; when I am sitting under my pecan tree with a book in my hand, and staring off at the hills in the distance, or when I am riding over the prairies, and, even in my dreams. Sometimes it may be only in imagination. I believe I am so imbued with it that I shall carry it home with me and still imagine it. It may haunt me all my life and finally compel me to return. This may sound a trifle weird, but it is a fancy not in any way unpleasant."

Upon entering the house Marian merely removed her hat in preparation for supper, and went into the long dining-room just as the family and the fourteen cowboys were sitting down to the table, at the head of which sat Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Luce, known to the boys as "Boss" and "Old Miss," or to Marian as "Uncle Dan" and

"Aunt Phoebe." At the foot of the table she sat with her cousin Bess, and on either side were seven cowboys, all dressed in the usual blue flannel shirt, leather trousers, top boots and red handkerchief.

Marian slid into her place as the last cowboy lounged into the room, removed his broad felt hat, and threw himself into his chair. Uncle Dan cut the blessing rather short, for he was anxious to introduce his pretty niece to the expectant and delighted youths.

"Say, Boss," began the latest comer, "it's mighty good to be back here again. I felt all stived up while I was in St. Louis. I wanted to get out and holler; but Lord! people gawped if you even talked out loud." This speech concluded, he settled down on the small of his back, and with a sigh of content, began shoving pickled beef into his mouth with the blade of a rather sharp knife.

"Marian," began Uncle Dan, "I want to make you acquainted with the ten new boys who have just got home. I've told 'em not to be disheartened because you saw the others first, as I reckoned they hadn't had much time to make an impression as yet. I feel that I've got to get you married to a real live Texan; you're too all-fired good for New York. Now, Fritz, here, is

looking for a wife." At this the conscious Fritz looked down with a sheepish air, amid the uproars of his companions; for Fritz was the most diffident of them all.

"Next is William Wilder, commonly known as 'Wild Bill;' but you needn't be afraid of him—he ain't half as ugly as he looks."

"Wild Bill" snickered and tried to look a little tougher than was his wont. Marian winced under his bold glance, and turned to the next candidate for introduction.

"Our baby, Walter Mayberry. He goes to Sunday-school, has a lovely mother, and a handsome big brother. He's worth cultivating."

Marian looked with a smile into the deep blue eyes which said, even plainer than the lips, "I am pleased to meet you."

"Now quit making eyes at Walt, and let me present Hugh, our ladies' man, whose name ought to be spelt without the final H." Hugh's face, beaming with kindly mirth, looked positively seraphic.

"Now here's Gustus Giles, our Yale man, called 'The Professor.' He can talk Greek and Latin, and knows the distance to all the planets better'n he does to Galveston. He can make love to you in a dozen different languages, and we can't one of us tell what he's saying."

"The Professor" gave a courtly bow with an air of superiority, and Uncle Dan continued:

"As for the rest of them, you'll have to find out their pints yourself. You can have any one of them, and I suppose you'll make your own selection. If you can't do that, we'll have a roundup and let 'em shoot each other off till there's only one left—but I just want to introduce you to one more, and warn you against Tad Perkins, that last one on your side. We call him 'The Tadpole.' He's terribly wicked; has killed a lot of men an' broken scores of hearts. Why, he hasn't a mite of conscience. He's a regular hell-a-buster."

Tad Perkins, a callow youth with the complexion of a girl, a meek expression of countenance, looked very proud, thinking that with such a reputation he would certainly have the inside track.

"Say, Boss," spoke up one of the boys, "did you know Miss Marian walked clean down to the Viles place this afternoon and walked back again?"

Uncle Dan dropped his fork in consternation. "Walked four miles, with forty horses on the place eating their heads off! Why didn't some of you stop her? It was plumb crazy of her. If it gets out, her father will never forgive me.

Why did you do such a thing?" he groaned, looking at Marian reproachfully.

"Why, Uncle, I love to walk," she said.

But he would not be pacified.

"If not for your sake, and not for my sake, for God Almighty's sake, don't do it again," he said.

"You can have all the horses you want; I'd not begrudge you a dozen. What will your father say when he hears it?"

"Why, father likes to have me take long walks," she said, "but I did feel a little frightened for a moment this afternoon;" and she related her adventure.

A silence followed. Uncle Dan gave Gus a quick look, which was intercepted by a glowering one from Bill.

"You must remember that you are not in New York," said her uncle gently, "even the boys here on the ranch go armed."

"Oh, I had a pistol with me," and Marian took a small pistol from her pocket.

"Do you call that a pistol?" roared Uncle Dan reaching for it, and holding it up in derision. "It would make a good watch charm, but if you hit a man with that and he ever found it out he'd be right mad."

"Marian," broke in Aunt Phoebe at that point, "ain't your real name Mary Ann? It ought to

be if it ain't. It's a good, sensible old English name. I just pride myself that I married into one of the old English families. I have the Luce genealogy up-stairs, but I suppose you know it by heart, as you're a Luce. I tell everybody round here about the Luce family, the scutcheon and the crest, an' the statute of Lord Luce in a big square in London. They may think I don't know much, but I knew enough to marry into a family that can't be beat, as far as blood goes,—More'n that, I know a bull yearling from a two year old heifer, and that's more'n you city folks know."

A profound silence followed this harangue during which Marian's eyes were glued to her plate. "The Professor" and Walt gazed at her with open sympathy, while the rest of the boys looked at each other with sly winks and grins, and administered sundry kicks under the table.

"You know," struck in Uncle Dan, "since I've made money your Aunt Phoebe wants to put on style, so I've let her have Brussels carpets and stuffed chairs, and I was fool enough to let Bess marry a good-for-nothing feller who couldn't do a thing but sit around and smoke, just because she and her ma thought he was an aristocrat. He warn't worth killin', as even Bess will allow now. The triflinest no-count feller that ever straddled a hoss! He had his own way for a

couple of years. He had the world by the tail and a down-hill pull, sure enough. I gave 'em a ranch, but he demanded more and more, 'til he wouldn't be satisfied without the whole earth, an' a little slice of Hell for a hog-pen; so Bess up and left him, and now he's prowling about, threatening to kill her. Just let him show up here, an' we'll see who does the killing."

At these remarks Marian cast a furtive glance over her shoulder, half expecting to see the recreant husband lurking somewhere in the shadow.

"Whenever the wind blows and the boughs creak at night," said Bess, "I'm always afraid its him creeping in at the window."

Marian's ready sympathy went out at once to her cousin, and she turned toward her, showing her emotion in her face.

"Don't you slop over, Miss Marian, till you hear the other side," drawled Wild Bill, at which Bess gave him an angry glance.

"Bess would marry again if she found the right man," went on Uncle Dan; and "I reckon she would," muttered Wild Bill in an undertone which fortunately Bess did not overhear.

"How old are you now, Marian?" demanded the old gentleman.

During the slight pause which followed this

personal question, Marian noted the curious glances cast in her direction, and the mirth which seemed to arise more from embarrassment than from any visible cause.

"I am twenty-four, Uncle," she said calmly.

"We call that pretty old for a girl out here. You'd best be picking out a partner without losing any time. I'd recommend Fritz," he added with a chuckle.

"What's the matter with me, Boss?" shouted several voices, and amid a chorus of laughter and would-be-witty remarks the boys, with kindly, half-bashful nods to Marian and Bess, picked up their hats and lounged out of the room, giving vent to loud halloas as soon as they reached the open air.

"There's the boy for you," said Uncle Dan, as Walter Mayberry left the room last of all.

"No indeed, Pa," put in Bess. "He hasn't a cent to his name. They came from the F. F. V's; (First Families of Virginia) descended from a poor Lord who came to Virginia in the days of Queen Elizabeth, and they've been poor and proud ever since. They're awful pious, too. Why! They won't play cards on a week-day, and on Sunday they shut themselves up in their house and only crawl out to go to church. Better set

your cap for Jay Carruth. He's rich, handsome and lively."

"Thank you," laughed Marian good-naturedly, "but it is too important a matter to settle in a hurry."

"Can you take care of yourself for a while, honey?" said Bess. "I've got to look after Dad's books. The lazy fellow won't do a lick of work when Maw and I are about," and she looked affectionately at her father, who was beside her.

"Well, what are daughters for, anyway?" he retorted playfully, and they went off together, leaving Marian seated alone in the dining-room. She was thinking of the various events of the day and of the cowboys presented to her notice. The two she had met in the afternoon were all she had pictured them in her dreams, but those at her uncle's table seemed somewhat common with the exception of Gus, who was evidently a gentleman. Bill inspired her with both repulsion and fear, but he was a trusted employé of her sagacious old uncle, so he must be all right.

Her meditations were interrupted by the sound of voices under the window. One was the deep growl of Wild Bill, and the other replied in a soft liquid tone. They were talking in Spanish, a language Marian understood but slightly, but she heard Wild Bill say,

"Your wife was looking for you this afternoon."

She could not understand the quickly uttered reply, but it was followed by a low "Hist" from Bill, and a firmer step approached, then, to her great relief, the genial Gus looked in at the window.

CHAPTER III.

IT was still light when Gus, to his apparent surprise, beheld Marian seated alone and leaning pensively over the table, with her chin in her two hands, gazing intently at the scene which lay beyond the open window. The sky was now brilliantly dyed with the red and yellow of the setting sun. Two men on horseback were galloping over the long stretch of high grass now almost peacock blue in the reflection of the sky. A third at such a distance as to be almost indistinguishable sat on his horse waving his arms and uttering a series of demoniac yells peculiar to the cowboy and the North American Indian.

"Whoo—ah—oo," yelled the youth, and after several repetitions of the sound, as if, by magic, it were calling spirits from the vasty deep, cows uprose from all directions, as though they were coming out of the ground. The men slowed up as the cows gathered round them, and slid gently to the ground.

"What in the world are they doing?" mused

Marian, feeling as if she were Alice in Wonderland, and being prepared for almost any strange sight. Then she glanced at the long ell which joined the main house and consisted of a series of rooms entered only from the open field, each the stronghold of two of the boys. "If he is a horse-thief, I am well protected," she thought. She looked after the men again to find them nearly out of sight.

"Let's have a little jack-rabbit hunt," broke in a voice, and she saw the powerful Gus still standing on the veranda, chewing tobacco and spitting the juice wherever it might chance to land. "You won't need to change your dress," he added, coming nearer to the window, "you're all right, just as you are. How do you like it down here? It's some different from New York, I reckon, but I tell you a pretty girl is appreciated here more than anywhere else in the world."

"What is that man doing?" said Marian, paying no attention to his remark.

"Oh, he's salting cattle. Giving them bunches of the salt he brought in his saddle bags. We have to do that every little while. Wouldn't you like to go over yonder?"

Marian readily assented and at once stepped through the low window, and stood beside him.

"What horse do you want?" he asked.

"Uncle told me I had best take 'old Barebones' for mine," she answered. "He says he's a good reliable horse, and I'm not much used to riding. I'm going to train him to come when I call."

"In the meantime," returned Gus drily, "we will solicit his services in the customary manner." Then taking down a rope which hung on a post of the veranda, he vaulted the railing and plunged after the animal, catching him with the first throw. The two horses were saddled with lightning rapidity, both with men's saddles. Marian climbed laboriously into her own, stubbornly refusing the help of her companion. "I want to learn to do these things as the rest of you do," she explained.

Calling the few hounds in sight they started off in the direction of the yelling and apparently distracted cowboys. As they rode swiftly along, the dogs roused up one or two long-eared jack-rabbits. Marian was delighted with the sight of the slender hounds, and the rabbits bobbing up and down, now appearing, now disappearing in the tall grass.

"They look like a school of fish jumping over each other in the water," she said.

"They do, sure enough."

"But the hounds never catch the jack-rabbits, do they?" she continued.

"Very seldom. We let the rabbits alone. They do no harm alive, and are no good dead; but when we hunt wolves and foxes we mean business."

"And don't you ever use anything but a six-shooter?"

"Oh, yes, but not very often. We can do pretty good work with it. See that old buzzard up yonder in the distance? Just watch him now;" and at the quick report of the pistol the bird fell.

"Buzzards are frightful-looking birds," said Marian after duly admiring his skill as a marksman.

"Yes, but they have their place in life, and fill it well. They are scavengers. Belong to our health department so to speak. They appear to have a contract with the Carruths this week. They are swarming there in bunches. Probably it is a couple of dead cows; they never touch a live body, however small. I can't say that of the wolves, the foxes and the hawks. I'll tell you sometime about my encounter with a mad wolf, but now I am going to tell you about the dead man we found here a month ago. He was a ranger, one of the few who dared to hunt for

cattle thieves openly, or who did it; but he had a bullet neatly plunked through his temple from a skilful hand—that is certain.”

“Do you often run into things of that sort?” Marian glanced nervously around her and drew nearer to her companion.

“Oh, no! I never did before. It is usually very tame here. Your uncle has been afraid to have you come before, fearing you might die of boredom, but now he is worrying lest some harm come to you; for we have had a good deal of trouble off and on since Bess’s marriage. Cows and horses and even men have disappeared from time to time from the various ranches. We take turns now doing picket duty at night—and I believe Tom Mayberry never sleeps at all. He is such a devil of a fighter when he gets started that they’re afraid of him—”

“How about the Carruth family?”

Gus chuckled. “Oh, Jay never worries about anything—but I’ve no doubt he makes the niggers watch out. He’s lost more’n all the rest of us put together, but he can afford it.”

Marian would have questioned him further had they not arrived within speaking distance of the three men. At their approach the consultation was brought to an end; the Mexican turned his horse’s head and sullenly moved away. Wild

Bill sat his horse squarely and merely nodded his head, while the third man sprang to the ground, and sweeping off his hat advanced to meet them. "A very attractive little fellow," thought the New York girl delighted with the utter abandon of his manner, the graceful swing of his walk and his bold handsome features. Gus helped her to descend from her horse that she might meet the young man on a more equal footing.

"Miss Luce, Mr. Carruth," he said, and the two shook hands laughing good-naturedly as Mr. Carruth at once referred to the incident of the afternoon.

"Why wouldn't you let me give you a lift?" he queried regarding her with undisguised admiration. There was at the same time an apparent consciousness that he himself could be no less than pleasing to any lady.

"How did I know," answered the girl evasively, "that you were not some desperate character?"

"He is!" interjected Gus, at which Gus laughed and Marian's eyes twinkled appreciatively.

"But how do you happen to be out here when Tom Mayberry and his mother are at the house?" inquired Jay.

"So soon? Then we must go back!" exclaimed the girl in surprise.

Jay made a gesture of mock despair. "Just like me to spoil my own chances," he groaned.

"Won't you come back with us?" asked Marian.

"Sure I will. I don't intend to let that cousin of mine get ahead of me."

"So he is your cousin. That accounts for the resemblance."

"Why! Have you already met him?" asked Jay in surprise, but Marian was spared an answer by Gus, who called out,

"Hold on there, Bill, I want to speak with you. Jay, will you take Miss Marian home? I'll come along later."

"Are you willing to trust yourself to me after the reputation Gus has given me?" inquired Jay looking archly at Marian.

"The decision seems to have been taken out of my hands," she laughed, gazing after Gus as he galloped off with Bill.

"My cousin Tom is a much better man than I am," he remarked as they rode along together.

"You are generous," she answered.

"More than you realize, for we are destined to become hated rivals."

Marian felt a little confused, but was about to

answer when her horse shied violently to one side nearly unseating her.

"Steady, boy, steady!" said Jay. Then they were both startled by the appearance of a man, half hidden by the bushes. As he stepped into full view, Marian looked at him in astonishment.

"All the good-looking men round here seem to resemble each other," she thought. "It can't be wholly the costume."

Jay's face turned white as the man approached. "Excuse me a moment," he said to Marian, and jumping from his horse he stepped to one side with the stranger. After a short conference carried on in a low tone, the man again disappeared, seeming to melt into the shadows, and their ride was continued, but a change had come over Jay and he bore a more marked resemblance to his cousin Tom, as his laughing, careless demeanor was replaced by a graver one.

"I find I must go back to my ranch this evening," he said after a moment's silence. "Nothing but the direst necessity would keep me away from you all this evening."

"I hope nothing serious has happened," remarked Marian, looking in surprise at his clouded face.

"Not at all," he answered lightly trying to throw off the burden, but too apparent. "One of

my men just came to tell me of a little business I had forgotten."

"Was that one of your men?" she asked in amazement. "Why, he looked just like you."

"Nonsense!" he said sharply. "You couldn't see clearly in the moonlight, and it was the costume."

Then he added more gently, "I beg your pardon, I didn't mean to be so abrupt. Here come the other two. I will leave you in Gus's charge while I go on with Bill. You may be sure I shall take the earliest opportunity of calling on you."

He repeated the story about "one of his men" to Gus, then galloped away, sweeping off his hat in farewell to Marian and calling out to Gus,

"Don't let Tom cut me out."

"Not on your life," answered Gus. Then turning to Marian he said:

"Come, Miss Marian, we must hasten back."

CHAPTER IV.

UPON reaching the house they espied Bess pacing nervously up and down the veranda.

"Oh, there you are!" she cried, rushing out to meet them. "I thought you'd never come. Maw had a duck fit and a hen spasm when she saw you weren't anywhere round, and we all had a regular hog-killing time hunting for you when the nigger here said she saw you riding off with Gus."

"I ain't a nigger, I's a nifero," corrected the little girl.

"Mrs. Mayberry's here and Tom," Bess urged impatiently. "Hurry up and come in."

Marian slid from her horse, a troubled expression on her face, and one of slight annoyance.

"It is all right, my dear," said a sweet voice, as the owner—a noble middle-aged looking woman—emerged from the house.

"This is Mrs. Mayberry, Madge," said Bess awkwardly. Marian felt so drawn to this woman that her impulse was to throw herself on her neck in response to her salutation.

"Tom!" called Bess. "Come on out."

At once the doorway was darkened by the already familiar form of Jay's cousin. His glance was timid in comparison with the dashing cousin, and his manner subdued, as he acknowledged the introduction without any reference to the encounter of the afternoon.

"Of course you could not know we were coming," he said reassuringly in answer to her apologies.

Gus grinned. "News travels fast in this part of the country," he remarked.

"Whatever he may mean by that," Marian hastened to explain blushing and looking at Tom a trifle roguishly. "I did not know you were to be here until I met Mr. Carruth, and then at his instigation, and quite in accord with my desire, we turned back at once."

"By the way, where is Jay?" asked Mrs. Mayberry, as the party turned to enter the house. Gus repeated Jay's story.

"The man looked very like Mr. Carruth himself," remarked Marian.

This announcement had a singular effect upon the company. Tom and Gus looked at each other in consternation. Bess turned pale and leant against Mrs. Mayberry for support.

"You may have imagined that," said the elder lady putting her arm around Bess.

"Very likely. It is easy to fancy a resemblance when costumes are so similar."

"Jay has a brother," remarked Hugh who had joined the group, "but it isn't likely that you saw him, for he wouldn't dare show his face round here."

"Why not?"

"Oh, he's a noted outlaw. The detectives are on his track with instructions to get him dead or alive. He has a big gang of followers, some of them known, others only suspected."

"Moreover," broke in Gus, "there are a lot of men going about here posing as honest men who are in league with Joe. We—I mean the detectives, can't prove enough against them to warrant their arrest, but we're watching them, and for all they are pretty cute, they'll overstep themselves some day."

"Do you suppose any of them are on this ranch?" asked Marian.

"Possibly," he answered evasively. "But you can see it isn't safe for you to wander off alone. You can't tell an honest man from a desperado. Like as not I'm one myself."

"You," laughed Mrs. Mayberry. "Don't heed him, Miss Marian. He's good as gold."

"I'm a lazy no-account toad," returned Gus, almost sadly. "With my education I might have

been somebody, but the shiftlessness of my progenitors is in my blood, so I'm hardly worth killing."

Whereupon Mrs. Mayberry broke in quickly, "You're a fine lad, Gus, and you shan't abuse yourself. Daniel Luce says you're his most faithful worker. Remember also that you have the best of your life still before you. It is my firm belief we can overcome even inherited weakness, if we persevere daily and ask the help of our Heavenly Father."

"You couldn't think ill of any one," replied Gus affectionately. "You're one of the fortunate people who have little to overcome."

"Then," answered the lady, "I don't really deserve as much credit as you and Jay who have to fight your inheritance much of the time."

"Jay has only part of his ancestors to fight," laughed Gus, "for his mother was one of your own family, if I remember aright."

"Yes, she was my cousin," answered Mrs. Mayberry, "and certainly she was a saint."

"The only decent creature that ever married into that family," said Bess bitterly.

"No! no! dear," said Mrs. Mayberry, putting her arm about the girl, while Marian looked at her in surprise.

Tom turned to her quickly, noting her expres-

sion. "The Carruths are of old Virginia stock, like ourselves," he began, "but there is the old cavalier blood in their race, always looking for adventure,—and loving pleasure and ease."

"Worse than that," interposed Hugh. "There has always been at least one really bad one in every generation. Now that Joe Carruth, who married Bess, is about as low-down a wretch——"

"What!" gasped Marian, looking at Bess's pale face with a better understanding of her emotion. Then her mind instantly recurring to Jay, she said, "Is he really the brother of the man I met to-night?"

"I didn't want her to know that, Gus," said Bess looking at him reproachfully, "but I suppose it would have to come out sooner or later. Joe isn't all bad and Jay is really a good fellow."

"When he's sober," put in Hugh.

"He's no worse than the rest of you in that," retorted Bess.

"Well, he looks enough like his ornery brother to pass for him, and has found it rather awkward on several occasions; but that ain't his fault. Jay really is a good chap, as you say, and I wouldn't prejudice Miss Marian against him for the world. Let's change the subject."

Marian felt for her cousin's hand and held it

in hers. "Poor girl!" she thought. "Her life is a ruin at its very beginning."

"Why doesn't he go far away from here?" Marian demanded too much interested to think of anything else.

"I reckon he loves his wife so much that he can't," said Tom smiling at Bess.

"And do you love him still, Bess?"

"Not a whit. I loathe him."

Marian moved slightly from her.

"She had good reason for that," interposed Mrs. Mayberry, who had observed the action.

"But can a real love actually die out altogether?" she asked.

Tom looked impressed and entered enthusiastically into the general discussion of that all-absorbing topic.

"May I take you to prayer-meeting to-morrow night?" he asked with some embarrassment as they rose to leave. "It is about the only thing there is to take a girl to here.—I feel kind of mean trying to get ahead of Jay," he continued still more shyly, after he had received her answer in the affirmative. "And as a matter of fact, I expect I'll have him to fight. I may be the bigger but he stands just as good a chance of licking me as I him."

Mrs. Mayberry, while taking her departure,

urged Marian to return her call as speedily as possible, and Bess promised in her name that it should be done.

"Madge, come in and sleep with me," pleaded Bess when they finally stood alone in the corridor. "I declare I feel as nervous as a witch."

"All right," the other assented.

Upon entering Bess's room, Marian observed that each window was fortified by iron bars, like those of a prison.

"I reckon you would have them, too, if somebody was round threatening to kill you; and had tried twice to carry you off," snapped Bess in return for her light raillery.

"Why did he try to carry you off?"

"I'll tell you some other time. I'm sleepy now."

"Tell me now."

"Oh, go to sleep. I reckon it is because he can't live without me."

"Bess!" whispered Marian quickly in a startled tone after the lights were out and curtain up. "Bess! I saw a face look in at the window!"

But Bess was already asleep and Marian listening with the intentness of fear, heard not a sound. Even the odor of the Algerita which usually soothed and satisfied her seemed heavy and oppressive.

CHAPTER V.

THE life of the ranch-owner is almost as luxurious and autocratic as that of an Oriental sovereign, and James Carruth enjoyed his privileges to their fullest extent. Living fifty miles from town, with no neighbors but the Mayberrys and Luces, he welcomed the advent of Marian as a gift from the Gods. Nothing but the direst necessity, as he himself truly said, would have forced him to desert the field as he had done the night before. He thought of his dear friend and cousin as a possible rival, but had no notion that he might be a successful one, nevertheless he did not intend to give him a second's advantage, and was quite chagrined when he heard Tom was to take the young lady to the camp-meeting.

It had been one of those hot days when not a breath of air was stirring and every movement seemed an exertion. Marian longed for the evening and the cooling breeze which always comes at nightfall. It came at last and with it Tom Mayberry in a neat little runabout.

"I got hurrahed not a little," he said, looking with admiration at Marian in her pretty muslin dress, "when the boys saw me with this wagon. They said I might take you to drive, but that Jay took you to ride on horse yesterday. Walt will never get over that. We never knew Jay get left before and it sort of tickled the whole of us."

"Tom," yelled a voice behind them, "it's goin' to rain bull yearlings in less'n two hours. What'll you bet it won't?"

"I'll bet Miss Marian a Yankee dime it won't rain for a week," called out Tadpole.

"What's a Yankee dime?" asked Marian.

"Oh, only some of Tadpole's nonsense," answered Tom evasively.

"In plain English, it means a kiss," interrupted Hugh, who was now riding along beside the carriage. "Say, Tom, am I in the way?"

"Not at all," answered Tom with an air of annoyance. "The fact is, Miss Marian, Hugh never will let a fellow alone when he has a girl with him."

"I'd like to know when you ever had a girl with you before," shouted Hugh.

"Pretty girls are as scarce as hen's teeth down here," he added "and none of us get much of a chance; but I'll ride on before Tom shoots," and off he dashed.

At last they arrived at the tent and as Marian agreed that it would be pleasanter outside than in, they drew rein where both preacher and congregation were in full view. Marian settled back to her surroundings, drinking in the breeze with perfect content. She had wondered once or twice if James Carruth were to be there, and not seeing him she scanned the country for a glimpse of him.

"He'll be here sure," answered Tom to her inquiry. "Jay's always on hand when there's anything doing, be it a hog killing, a branding, a dance, or a prayer-meeting."

"I don't know that I really care if he doesn't come," thought Marian. "Mr. Tom Mayberry makes me feel very comfortable but there is something of an uncertain quality about this fascinating Mr. Carruth." She was about to settle back again with a peaceful but, perhaps, somewhat bored feeling, when her face lighted and she bent forward eagerly. The gentleman in question had just appeared, accompanied by several others, all of whom, after duly saluting Marian, stationed themselves by the side of the carriage, sitting sideways on their saddles so they might "watch the show" and make running comments upon it for Marian's benefit.

The new Tabernacle was a large round tent

filled with pews which were crowded with people. Marian sat where she could easily watch the preacher's face. This central tent was surrounded by others from which people constantly emerged. The grounds were filled with cattlemen, young and old, all dressed in cowboy fashion, and with clanking spurs at their heels. Every belt held a knife and a six-shooter, even at this religious gathering. These weapons are still carried in places remote from the towns, although forbidden by law. Their walk was the peculiar swing of men used to the saddle.

"Yes, we all walk spraddle-legged," was the comment of Gus, in answer to her inquiring observation.

The comparatively few women showed more variety in their dress, though no more befitting the scene, for their attire, in the main a home-made attempt at style, was very rarely successful; but her opinion Marian kept to herself, feeling something pathetic about the striving after the beautiful in these narrow lives.

At some distance from the tent, but near enough to hear the words of the preacher, was a small body of negroes.

"Why don't they go in?" asked Marian innocently.

The boys near her stared in surprise at her

question, but Gus, who had been "up North," remarked sarcastically.

"Niggers aren't allowed to be saved in this country."

"Niggers ain't really human, anyway, are they, Gus?" laughed Jay.

"I reckon they're not," answered Gus calmly.

"Does anyone think they are?" queried Hugh.

"I do," answered Tom with dignity; but the other boys looked at each other and exchanged confidential opinions that Tom was trying to get solid with Miss Marian, for up North a nigger was held to be as good as a white man.

Before the discussion could begin again, "Brother Butler," the regular preacher, with "Sister Butler" and two little Butlers, drove up to the tent.

"Good-evening, my friends," called the preacher pleasantly. "Let me shake hands with our new sister. My wife, Mrs. Butler, sister Luce. You are one of the elect, I hope," he added with a searching glance.

"I am a member of the Episcopal Church," answered Marian, and an embarrassing silence fell upon the group, followed by the comforting assurance from the preacher that she would be all right, doubtless, after the revival.

"Well," urged the good man—for good he

truly was— “we want you all on the Lord’s side to-night. Remember that we are but sojourners here, and that Heaven is our home.”

“We’re a long way from home down here, then,” muttered Gus, as the preacher passed on to greet others of his flock.

“They’ve got their eyes on Wild Bill to-night, and they’ll get him, no matter where he’s sneaking,” whispered Gus.

“Is he really so bad?” asked Marian.

“Well, he ain’t so wicked as he is tough. He wouldn’t kill a white man just for fun, nor run off with a married woman against her will; but he occasionally amasses enough liquor to put him out of business for a day or two, and he is in such constant practise in that line that it requires no small amount. He ain’t, so to say, sweet tempered at any time, but he’s worse when he’s drunk. Then he has been known to turn a penny or two at the gaming table.”

“Of co’se—but we all do that,” spoke up Tadpole, “and get full on Christmas and other holidays; a feller’s got to do somethin’ for fun, but we’re *safe*, and you’ve got to look out for Bill. The soberer he is the straighter he can shoot. I don’t know what kind of a lady’s man he is, but—Godfrey Snakes, look there! Harris and Fritz are walking right into the tent—into the lion’s

den, so to speak. Fritz is in for it, sure's a gun. There'll be some fun directly." A ripple of excitement ran through the little crowd.

"Ain't the evangelist a regular guy!" commented Tad, as that individual arose and in a sepulchral voice gave out the hymn, "When the Roll is Called Up Yonder," with an expression which Gus characterized as "a dying duck in a thunder shower."

"That there preacher don't appeal to me like he had a mite of humility," remarked one negro to another.

"He means 'humanity,'" whispered Gus.

"I think him and me would have a discrepancy, sure," continued the black man, as the divine, whose name was Sin Killer Jones, gave out the text, "He will separate the sheep from the goats."

"What a pity Brother Butler don't speak to-night," said Tom in a disappointed tone.

"Oh, but this feller's a powerful speaker," urged Tad enthusiastically.

"Just the same, I don't like his looks," observed Marian who had been studying his face. "I don't trust him. I think he's one of the goats."

"That's just the way I feel," Tom agreed. "His sermons are all full of fire and brimstone, and never a word about the love——"

"Oh, you've got love on the brain," giggled Hugh.

"Just the same," persisted Tom turning very red, "I don't think this man is sincere."

"His voice and his face are against him," chimed in Marian.

"Yes," his champion grudgingly assented. "He might get a new face to advantage, anyhow so far as beauty goes."

Tom meanwhile was conversing with Gus in an undertone. "Can't you ask S. K. where he is to spend the night?" he queried.

"No, that might embarrass him—"

"Sure enough," both the boys laughed, and Gus continued, "but I'll invite him to stay at the ranch, and if he refuses, we'll find out without asking."

"So old Sin Killer's back agin," broke in Bill who had ridden up at that juncture.

"A friend of yours, I believe," answered Tom sarcastically.

"Not a bit of it! What do you mean by that?" growled the gentleman.

"You needn't get so mad about it, though I confess I should hate to own it if it were me," Tom persisted.

"You'd better clear out till this meeting's over, Bill," called Jay. "The women are all on the

watch for you, to bring you into the fold to-night."

Bill looked darker than ever, but vouchsafed no reply.

"Could such a man ever be converted?" whispered Marian.

"I don't know," he answered. "I wish he might, but it would be almost a miracle."

At this point a cattleman of mature years, who had drawn up at a short distance, urged his horse a little nearer to the group, watching them with so keen a glance that Marian turned to Tom to see if he had observed him.

"S. K. Jones is giving it to them for fair," he remarked to Gus in the broad dialect of the low country, and as he caught Tom's eye a quick recognition passed between them.

"Do you know him?" asked Marian, for in this stranger she recognized the older of the two men whom she had overheard on the train.

"I think I have seen him before," was his somewhat evasive answer.

"He is rather striking looking," she continued, but as Gus made no answer she turned her attention to the Tabernacle.

"Jay," called a youth from the Carruth ranch, "did you collect that bill to-day?"

"You bet I did, sonny!"

Marian laughed as she said mischievously, "I've heard that Southerners never paid their bills."

"Well, they pay them down here, right smart quick. It's easy collecting them, too. We take the bill in one hand and a six-shooter in the other, and the money's paid right on the spot, without a word of argument."

The evangelist continued his impassioned address, his voice gaining in volume as he proceeded, till the echoes rang with it.

"What do you think of him?" asked Tom.

"I hardly know," replied the girl meditatively. "He seems very much in earnest, but somehow I feel as if he didn't really believe what he says."

"There have been some ugly things hinted about him," Tom informed her, "and no one really knows much about the man; but Brother Butler won't believe a word against a preacher. He insists that as one of the Lord's annointed, Jones can be a great power for good in the community. Brother Butler is such a saint himself that the people about here adore him, even if he won't let them dance, play cards, or drink. They know no one else will help them as quickly in any real trouble. They take the evangelist on faith because Butler believes in him. The man has

power, certainly, but, like you, I doubt his sincerity. His personal magnetism is marvelous. Just see those girls crying over yonder, and those others jumping up and down with excitement."

Just then, the evangelist paused and said, "Brother Butler will now address the meeting."

The people quieted down as the good man arose. His rugged but earnest discourse showed the worth of real feeling. His hearers knew that he was sincerely anxious for their salvation, and it moved them all, as mere rhetorical effect could never do. At length the excitement rose to fever heat. Women on all sides were laughing and crying, and men were shouting. Marian felt herself trembling in sympathy.

"I never saw anything like this before," she whispered to Tom. "I can't understand it."

"We are an emotional people," he answered. "Always remember that in your judgment of us."

"The cowboy is essentially a tropical animal," laughed Gus; "you will see that more and more."

Just then the congregation began singing, "I'll Be Ready When the Bridegroom Comes."

At the end of the first stanza the evangelist called out: "Won't you come forward, dear friends, and give us a sign that you want to be

saved? Dear brother, dear sister, won't you come to-night?"

Much to Marian's surprise the bashful Fritz suddenly left his seat and advanced up the aisle, where he was met with joy by the little band around the evangelist. The other cowboys, instead of jeering, as she expected, reverently uncovered their heads as Fritz knelt. Marian looked over to where Jay was standing. His face had an exalted expression, which made it really noble.

"Where's Bill?" drawled Gus. "He's the most lurid sinner of this crowd." But Bill had disappeared.

"Are you ready to go now?" whispered Tom, and she assented, nodding a smiling farewell to the others as he took up the reins. As the horse moved slowly off she looked back at the excited crowd with the picturesque groups of cowboys, the knots of dark-skinned people on the outskirts and the be vies of women moving to and fro, entreating all to come forward.

Soon the tumult ceased, and only the hum of the insects, or the chirp of a sleepy bird was heard. Overhead the stars shone brightly; and a soft breeze blew back the light tendrils of hair on Marian's forehead. She glanced up at Tom,

as he sat strong and erect beside her, his face shaded by his wide-brimmed soft hat.

"You will be very late in reaching home," she said.

Tom turned toward her with a smile which lit up his rather sober countenance.

"I am not going home to-night," he returned. "I shall be obliged to attend to some work that will take me half the night and—"

Here the sound of horses' feet in the soft grass caused Tom to stop and listen. Almost immediately, it was followed by a pistol shot and a voice calling, "Halt!"

Tom seized Marian by the shoulder and pushed her violently from the seat, saying "Get down underneath! Take the reins!"

They were both behind the sheltering back seat in the fractional part of a second, the horse with the instinctive sagacity of that animal sprang forward, and dashed ahead with all the speed of an Arabian steed and without any urging or guidance. Tom had faced about with a powerful dark lantern in one hand, and a loaded revolver in the other. Both had been lying primed and ready for use in the bottom of the wagon. Rapid as their movements had been, another shot had whizzed over their heads and judging from the angry snort of the horse, it had evidently grazed

him lightly. Tom flashed the lantern and fired three successive shots directly ahead of him.

"One man is down," he remarked laconically. Then he fired three more, and waited. There was no sound in response. Marian was too frightened to question him. The position on the floor of the wagon was well-nigh intolerable. In the dark the little hills and valleys could not be avoided and they were constantly rattled and jolted; in several instances nearly thrown from the vehicle.

"It was evidently no joke," Tom whispered, "for they were masked. If anything should happen to me, just you hold the reins in one hand and this gun in the other; nobody's going to hurt a woman alone, and the horse will go on home without any help. But I believe they're going away. They see that they can't scare us, and it won't do them any good to kill us; moreover, we have an advantage over them with this dark lantern. They weren't prepared for that. Your Uncle Dan got it for me just lately."

"Did you ever expect to put it to such a use as this?"

"Never did! I think we can go slower now. Your back must be nearly broken."

"It is. Do you dare risk it to get on to the seat again?"

"Not quite yet. I am so sorry to have gotten you into this."

"Indeed, I feel that you have rather gotten me out of it. Most anyone else would have stood right there for fear of getting shot."

"Well, I knew they wouldn't gain anything by shooting us."

"How did you happen to be so well equipped?"

"Oh, since that feller was found dead, we've all gone armed to the teeth whenever we stir out at night."

"Won't you trust me enough to tell me who and what you think it was?"

Tom hesitated before answering.

"Yes, I will," he assented.

"But they are sure gone, scared away by our searchlight, and we can sit on the seat."

"Oh!" groaned Marian. She was trembling from fright, and from the exertion of her cramped position, when she finally with Tom's assistance, crawled from her retreat to a more comfortable position.

"In return for my confidence," he went on, while he was helping her, "you must agree not to mention this little occurrence. It might cause a panic among the younger boys. Then there are other reasons for silence. My private opinion is we were pursued by Joe Carruth and some of

his confederates. They want certain information and some concessions from me, and have been watching for this very chance."

"Then you believe Joe Carruth is in this vicinity?"

"Yes. I have thought so ever since what you said the other night, and so has Gus."

Marian leaned back overpowered by emotion and was glad to see the lights of her uncle's ranch twinkling in the distance.

CHAPTER VI.

AT noon the next day, Marian, nothing daunted, found herself returning on foot from a visit to the Mexican village, which lay on her uncle's ranch but a short distance from the house.

She had not closed her eyes the night before, and at the first ray of dawn had risen to dress herself and to walk out into the cool morning air. All was as tranquil as a New England farm at that hour. The spirit of peace and the freshness of the atmosphere calmed her nerves and braced her, so that at breakfast she had succeeded in appearing quite her usual self.

But again she felt that she must get away alone, and accordingly she set out on foot, intending not to go out of sight of the house. Returning from the Mexican village her natural good spirits had risen above her fears and apprehensions. How good it was to be alive on a day like this, and how promising the future seemed in this enchanted country!

The sound of a horse's hoofs on the soft earth

came to her ears, and almost at the same moment a horse and rider appeared on the top of a hillock as if springing from the earth. Marian glanced quickly at him and encountered the keen eyes of the cattleman who had so earnestly regarded her at the camp-meeting the evening before.

"Good-evening," he said, removing his broad hat and springing to the ground by her side. "Can you tell me if I am on the Luce ranch?"

"You are," she answered looking at him with appreciation. He was a tall, erect, healthy specimen of manhood, about forty years of age, who looked as if he had spent the most of his life in the open air.

"I have ridden for fifty miles," he explained, "alone with the green grass, the cows, the blue sky, and God Almighty. It was getting a bit monotonous, and I was glad to see a human. I am going to stop at the Luce ranch to-night."

Then he added in a different tone, "You saw me last night at the camp-meeting?"

"Yes, and I saw you on the train, too."

"Did you?" The man looked surprised. "May I be pardoned," he suggested, "if I warn you not to go so far from your house and on foot? It's the greatest luck if nothing happens to you."

"Everyone tells me that," she retorted.

"If you will mount my horse, I will lead him

in any direction you suggest," he offered hospitably.

"On the contrary, I want you to mount him. You cattlemen do so hate to walk."

"Now that is a fact. I could ride from here to New York without stopping, but it nearly kills me to walk a mile—you see I suspect you are from that city—recognize your accent."

"Have you been there?" she asked.

"Oh, yes! I've been all over the country. You Northern girls are so well protected in your large cities, you have little to fear, but this is a lawless place. Where are you going all by yourself, if I may ask?"

"I was on the way to Señora Picarda's."

He gave her a quick glance, and his color rose a little, but Marian continued,

"She is a most hospitable soul and loves to have me come to see her. She gives me tortillas and frijoles to eat, and tells me all about her life in Mexico. She has two lovely little girls, but her home is a wretched hovel, and her husband—Well!" and Marian shrugged her shoulders with an air of aversion.

"What about her husband?"

"I don't really know much about him, except that he works for my uncle."

"Works!" he repeated with a short laugh.

"Why, do you know him?"

"I know the Greasers, and they are all alike,—a shiftless, mongrel race on a par with niggers. Is Señor Picarda usually at home?"

"No. He often disappears for days, then comes back and lies around till the cool of the evening when he goes to work. I think he is at home now."

There was silence for a moment, then he inquired, "What did you think of the preacher last night?"

She hesitated. "I like Brother Butler. He seems to be a good man, but S. K. Jones, as the boys call him, though a powerful preacher, doesn't please me at all. What do you think of him?"

He threw up his head with a short laugh. "I think a man needn't go around looking like a sick monkey eating potash, just because he's pious."

They had been walking along side by side, the stranger leading his horse, when the ranch came into view.

"Here we are at home, and just in time for dinner," exclaimed Marian. "You know my uncle, I presume."

"No. I only came on a matter of business."

"Then come right into the dining-room."

"Come on, Marian," shouted Uncle Dan from the head of the table, "we're waiting on you, like one hog waits on another."

Then seeing the stranger, he came forward with extended hand, for a prepossessing stranger was always gladly welcomed at the Luce ranch.

The man, after announcing himself as Mr. Hyslop, of Athens, was presented to the rest of the company, and cordially invited to partake of the meal which the hospitable hostess complained was not at all what it should be. Mr. Hyslop was at once taken into the confidence of the party, and encouraged to join in the conversation, which was perhaps unusually vivacious because of his presence. He praised the beauty of the country, expressed his desire to view more thoroughly the Luce ranch, and then, turning to the boys, he asked if they couldn't get up a hunting party. The boys agreed with enthusiasm.

"It's going to be cloudy for to-night, I'm afraid," said Tad, "but if it is we can go to-morrow night, for sure; there's a good moon now."

"If it is a dark night," said the "Boss" with decision, "you-all will have to stay and guard the ranch and stables. There's been some stealing round here of late. If I catch the thief, he'll be hung to the first tree without ceremony."

"Oh, Dan!" said Aunt Phoebe reproachfully, "that wouldn't be right now."

"Why not?" asked Uncle Dan. "If we catch him doing it, we're sure he's guilty."

"Say Dad," broke in Bess, "if it's a good night, mayn't Marian and I go hunting too?"

"I don't know," began her father doubtfully, when both Mr. Hyslop and Gus suggested that it would be too much for the ladies.

"You needn't worry about that," spoke up Jay quickly. "If they get tired, Harry and I will take them home."

Harry was a youth in Jay's employ, a handsome fellow of good family, who was very much in love with Bess, and not entirely scorned by that young lady. The two girls thanked Jay so enthusiastically that he felt he had scored one more point against Tom who had taken no part whatever in the debate.

"Marian," broke in Uncle Dan, "don't you want to hear a good story? I've a rip-tailed snorter of a story that Tom told me last night," and he looked mischievously at that young man who turned an agonized red.

"For Heaven's sake, don't tell her that story, Boss!" he gasped.

"Oh, I must tell it," he chuckled; "don't you want to hear it, Marian?"

"I am quite sure I would like any story of Mr. Mayberry's," she answered serenely.

"Don't you tell her that story, Boss," pleaded Tom, and "Now, you shut up, Dad," broke in Bess, "and give me some sop. Don't you want some sop, Marian?"

"Sop?" said Marian in a questioning tone.

"I mean sorghum. We call it 'sop' or long sweetening. Sugar is short sweetening. Didn't you ever eat any sorghum pie?"

"I never did," said Marian meekly.

"Well, it's right good, and sweet potato pie, too. We'll have some while you're here."

"Boss," spoke up Bill with an evil look, "ain't you goin' to tell that story? Goin' to let the women folks scare you out of it?"

"Oh, yes!" began the old gentleman. Tom glared at Bill and Aunt Phoebe rushed to the rescue.

"You, Bill," she said sharply, "just you shut up. Dan shan't tell any of his stories before Marian."

"Keep cool, Ma," interjected Bess. "As Marian and I have finished eatin' we'll leave Paw and Bill to tell stories to each other if they want to."

She rose from the table looking at Bill with

studied insolence, but her gaze fell before the look of glowering hatred which met hers.

"Why does Bill hate you so?" asked Marian impulsively, as they stood on the veranda about half an hour later.

Bess turned a little pale. "I don't know," she faltered. "I'm sure enough afraid of him, but I never let him know it. I wish Paw would turn him off, but he won't. Bill's a good worker, an' awful good to him. You know Paw is easy, bless his dear, lazy old carcass," and her eyes looked affectionately over the field where her father was riding with a group of other men.

"Look, now," she cried. "That new man is lugging off Dad and Tom, an' Jay is coming back to take us up on the Cliffs, just as he said he would."

CHAPTER VII.

TAD proved to be a good weather prophet, for that evening the moon was completely obscured by heavy black clouds. The girls, weary from their excursion, went to bed early, and Boss stationed the whole force of cowboys to watch in different parts of the field, and about the house and barns.

Two other cattlemen had arrived at nightfall, and the three guests, with a number of the cowboys, sat in the office of the barn, which had much the appearance of the officers' quarters in a campaign. At the door outside sat Mr. Hyslop half buried in the hay. At intervals a cowboy, with an air of mystery and some pleasant excitement, would poke his head in at the door and with bated breath report to Gus, and, receiving orders in an undertone, would dash off again like a small boy running to a fire.

Gus, who appeared to be the officer of the day, was half sitting, half standing, beside Bill, in a careless picturesque attitude, as though ready to

spring into action at the slightest warning. Tom and Jay sat at the other end of the table, with two others, playing poker. All were dressed in full cowboy fashion, with spurs which clinked at every movement. All were armed to the teeth, and all were smoking. There were bottles and glasses on the table, upon which Gus kept a sharp eye. The bare, boarded room was illumined by the light of a single hand lantern, half obscured by tobacco smoke. Jay's face wore its usual reckless expression, while Tom's heightened color gave his eyes an unwonted brilliancy.

"D—n your luck!" yelled Harry, as Jay quietly transferred a pile of coin from the table to a small box by his side. "Say, Tom, you-all ought to be lucky in love, if signs are true."

"Tom don't care nothing about the girls," said the other cowboy.

"I don't know," remarked Gus drily. "I think he's beginning to take notice;" at which they all looked at Tom who appeared a trifle annoyed.

"You'd better be careful, Gus," he said with a steely glitter to his eyes.

"Never you mind," replied that youth provokingly, "I didn't mention any names."

"He won't stand any chance with that girl," went on Harry, not minding in the least Tom's

savage glare. "He's too big and handsome. They're too well matched. Anything as ideal as that never comes off. A little peanut like Jay, now——"

"What do you mean!" roared Jay. "I'm as big as she is."

"'Tain't that, neither," growled Bill. "Tom's too doggon tame for a girl of spirit."

"Aren't you getting rather too personal?" asked Tom with dangerous quietness. "If we are going into personalities, you might tell us why you are not drinking anything this evening."

"I haven't any special reason," Bill stammered. "Yes, I have, too," he corrected. "I promised Boss I'd protect his property an' if it comes to a show-down I'm ready to give my life for it."

"Even against Joe Carruth?" asked Tom in an undertone, gazing in Jay's direction.

"There won't be any Joe Carruth here to-night," Bill muttered.

"How do you know that?"

"Damn you, I *do* know it, and that's enough!" he cried, jumping up with his hand on his revolver.

"What is the trouble, my friends?" said an oily voice, and, without the sound of a footfall,



“Damn you, I do know it, and that’s enough.”

the sleek form of Sin Killer Jones appeared in the doorway.

"I was about to call upon Brother Luce when I heard angry voices and felt it my duty to investigate the cause. Oh! my friends, do I behold you with the Devil's picture book before you, wasting your time in this sinful fashion?"

The boys looked at him with sarcastic smiles. "This ain't no camp-meetin'," sneered one of them.

From his position behind the hay, Mr. Hyslop muttered, "We can't ever get the drop on them two, they're too smart for us. That oily hypocrite can crawl out of any hole, but never you mind; I'll never let up till I cage 'em both."

"This senseless giggling does not always denote mirth," continued the Evangelist, gazing through the smoke which had become thicker than before. The odor of both the lantern and the tobacco smoke combined served to make them insensible of a slight smell of burning until Mr. Hyslop suddenly called out, "Fire! Fire! Look alive there,—the barn's been set on fire!"

All sprang to their feet.

"Outside there! quickly!" called Gus, "but don't ride off till I come out. Bill and Jones, stay here with Hyslop. Get the water buckets,

quick, boys, it's only started. Jay and Harry, go over to the house."

"Fire's all out, Gus," said Tom.

"Well, you and I will get out into the field. We'll catch 'em before they can get off with the cattle. Stay here, Bill," he reiterated sternly.

"Don't you trust me, Gus?" asked Bill with suspicious mildness.

"Someone's got to stay here," replied Gus evasively. Then, in a whisper to Hyslop, he said, "Keep 'em in sight."

"You bet!" was the emphatic answer.

"Boss, you and I are needed here," called Jay as he galloped up to the house, for the old gentleman, roused by the disturbance, was striding out to meet them. "The fire's out and the boys are looking after things."

"Isn't this terrible?" whispered Marian, coming out on the veranda, where Bess was plying Harry with questions.

Jay stood nearby, with face as set and eyes as stern as his cousin Tom's. He was gazing intently at a scattered group of riders and cows, which could be dimly seen at a distance by the straggling light of the moon which now and then pierced through the clouds. Then shot after shot rang out, and two bullets whizzed by the veranda.

Jay shifted his position, and quickly bade

Marian to stand farther back where she was protected by the side of the house. Two more shots were heard and Jay groaned aloud.

"Are you hurt?" called out Marian anxiously.

"Not a bit."

"What is it, then?"

"I—I—Oh, nothing," he answered huskily.

Marian in her excitement, thrust her head out again, but the moon had disappeared, and the field was shrouded in darkness.

"Go and see what has happened," she whispered to Jay.

"I can't leave my post to-night," he returned.

"You all go to bed and if anyone is killed, you'll know it to-morrow."

CHAPTER VIII.

EARLY the next morning Marian and Jay were asked by Uncle Dan to go on an important errand to Black Mountain. "No one else could be spared," he explained. So there was nothing to do but comply with his request. The trip together on a beautiful morning over a charming country would have been very pleasing at any other time, but both were secretly disappointed to miss the details of the morning's work, and the story of the events of the night before. Each felt there might be reasons, not explained, for choosing them for this errand. In spite of this fact the ride was enjoyable and Jay's taciturnity vanished under the sunny influence of his companion. They arrived at home just as the dinner-bell rang, and Marian entering the hall, overheard Uncle Dan as he conversed with one of the strangers.

"Jay is all right," she heard him say. "He's straight as a die; but we were afraid that his rascally brother—Oh, Marian," he added as he

heard her light footsteps, "so you're back. Come right in to dinner. Never mind your dress."

"Did they get away with any cattle last night, Gus?" whispered Jay anxiously as they sat down to the table.

"No, but they had a lot rounded up, and would have got 'em if we hadn't got there just as we did."

"Did—did you find out who they were, and was anyone killed or hurt?"

"No! We've been looking all the morning, but didn't find anyone; though I thought I saw two men drop last night."

Jay's brow cleared, and he heaved a great sigh of relief. Tom and Hyslop were still absent, and in their places sat the two strangers. The elder, who had very black hair and a fierce mustache, turned to Aunt Phoebe with an ingratiating air.

"We've been trying to make a bargain with the Boss here, for your cattle before they're all stolen," he said. "Perhaps you can persuade him to be a bit easier with us."

"I'm harder to deal with than the old man," said Aunt Phoebe promptly. "He's too aristocratic to haggle about prices. I do most of the bossing on this ranch."

"Keerect!" said Uncle Dan amiably.

"He supplied the old family tree, so he's done

his share," went on the old lady. "Dan and Marian's father, his own brother, can trace their ancestry back through the royal families of France and England, pretty near to the ark."

The cattlemen looked properly awe-stricken.

"A regular Apostolic Succession family," whispered Gus to Marian.

"They treat all that's kin to them like folks, too," continued Aunt Phoebe, "and never put on airs over them, as they could by rights."

"You people ain't spoiled by the money you've made, neither, every one says that," returned the cattleman politely.

"That's where blood tells," she answered proudly. "Look at them Packers up in Jerry! Triflin' no-count family! The boys just make me sick, callin' sodie 'soda' an' wearin' jardineros at night, or pejamas, or whatever they call them new-fangled things, drink sherry instead of good old moonshine rot-gut. They've got to quit that hifalutin' nonsense and come down to hard pan, same's the rest of us, you just mark my words; now the old man is dead there ain't nary one of 'em smart enough to keep what they've made, let alone addin' to it."

"Kit Packer is only a sheriff, now," said one of the men. "Kind of a come down, but he's an awful favorite in the county. If anything should

happen to him, there'd be no rest till he was avenged."

The speaker had addressed this last remark to Bill, who vouchsafed no reply.

"His cousin, Jack Packer, is working for us," broke in Aunt Phoebe. "He's the one who was hurt last night."

"Hurt?" cried Marian, her eyes dilating.

"Not badly," broke in Uncle Dan with a warning glance at his wife.

"Was anyone else hurt?" she demanded, intercepting the glance.

"No white man on our ranch," he replied. "Tom's gone home to look after his place and he took Hyslop with him. S. K. Jones remembered there were others of his flock who needed exhorting, and when relieved from duty at the barn, he galloped off as if the Devil was after him."

Gus gave a quick look at Bill, then whispered to Marian, "Tom and Hyslop are coming back to-night to go hunting with us."

"Remember," called out Uncle Dan, just catching the word "hunting," "that the girls are to stick to Jay and Harry. They'll be responsible for them and bring them back when they're tired."

Jay raised his head with a look of pleasure, and Bess, who had been very silent and subdued

throughout the dinner, exchanged a smile with Harry which made Bill glower worse than ever.

"It's the ruination of any Southerner to have money," said Gus, his mind reverting to the Packer family. "Just as long as they have to be, they are sober and industrious; but take away the necessity and may the Lord help them!"

"They have a great many charming qualities to offset their faults," remarked Marian.

"Most charming people ain't no-count to work," said Aunt Phoebe with decision. "The Lord seems to have created two kinds of people, the useful and the ornamental. The useful ones do all the work, and wait on the ornamental ones," giving a comprehensive glance at her daughter.

"Well, if the ornamental ones will entertain and be good to us, we'll gladly wait on them," interposed the gallant Hugh.

"The trouble is, they generally walk over us an' turn their noses up at us, while we work ourselves to death for them," added the new man sourly.

"I think women ought to run things," said Uncle Dan. "They do it better'n the men do."

"Why, Uncle Dan," laughed Marian, "do you believe in Women's Rights?"

"Women's Rights!" he laughed. "In this

part of the country that sounds funny. You'd better ask if I believe in *men's* rights. Down here the women are treated like goddesses, and they are perfect tyrants. Every woman ought to get married, though, and have only one man to abuse."

Aunt Phoebe, noting the embarrassment of the girls from the giggling and furtive glances in their direction, turned attention from them by relating one of her pet stories.

"It is perfectly natural for men and women to want to get married," was her introductory platitude. "Did you ever hear of the girl who was considering a young man, and before she gave her final answer, went to visit some of her married friends to see if marriage was a failure? The first one she visited had three young children, and, her husband not being overly smart, she was doin' her own work, sewin', and takin' care of the kids besides. As you kin imagine, she didn't have much time for visitin', concerts, or this here mental improvement they talk so much about now-a-days,"—with a side glance at Marian.

"The second friend," she continued, "had a husband who was generally ornery, and the two fit most of the time. The third's husband was an old fool who was rich and stingy, and never let her go anywhere or have anything. The fourth

was tryin' to keep her from gettin' a divorce, although he was running after everything in petticoats. Well! She went home, and what do you think she did?" looking at Marian.

"Why! She broke off with the young man at once," was Marian's decided answer.

"That shows how little you know of human nature," retorted Gus.

"Right you are, Gus," said Aunt Phoebe triumphantly. "She told him she would be ready to marry him in a week."

"Oh, hursh!" laughed Tad.

"Sure enough," answered Aunt Phoebe. "She reckoned she'd show 'em how to live."

"All signs fail in fair weather," broke in the cattleman, leaving the company to make their own application; then turning to Marian, he remarked, "I expect they rawhide you a lot about your beaux."

"Oh, you can't devil a Northerner two bits worth," said Aunt Phoebe, rushing to her assistance. "They're too cool and collected for that. You just ought to see Marian's dad! A big, stern man, so quiet and dignified he scares you half to death. He's the best lawyer in New York City."

"And fought against us in the Civil War, I expect," growled the other cattleman, who evidently

was on the constant lookout for a grievance. "God! it makes me sore to think how you devastated our lands, killed our brothers, and took away our slaves," he cried, turning to Marian.

"I didn't do it," she answered, surprised at his vehemence.

"And I did all I could to prevent it," spoke up Uncle Dan, as though vouching for her as a relative. "I tell you I couldn't bear the thought of being on the opposite side to brother George. We were born and raised in old Kentucky and Marian's father was educated at West Point. It's an old story, too common to be interesting, and it isn't wise to rake up quarrels."

"Especially after the wonderful display of generosity on both sides," broke in Marian enthusiastically, "a generosity quite unparalleled in history. It is no more this country and that country, but our own glorious country, a united whole."

"The rapidity with which the South is recovering from its losses, is certainly unparalleled," went on Gus proudly. "With all its natural resources, and the influx of Northern capital," smiling at Marian, "it will doubtless continue to advance."

"I believe that the South, or anyway, Texas, has a brighter future than any Northern state.

We Texans can never forget the glorious 'One Star,'" said one of the cattlemen stentoriously. "If it grows in the next twenty years as it has in the last, Boss, it'll sure enough beat the record."

"The old life went out when the railroad came in," mused Uncle Dan reminiscently. "Then I had to leave Phoebe for a six months' drive up to Chicago. Those were hard days, out in broiling sun or pelting rain, awful thunder or windstorms, snow or hail, it was all the same. We had to ride on every day, with all our togs, underclothes, slickers, leather trousers, and all, tied round us or tucked into our saddle bags. Then at night the stories went round and the moonshine, and the long-winded songs," and the old boys laughed merrily together.

"We had to take turns sitting up nights, armed to the teeth, sure enough, and on the alert for every stranger who couldn't or wouldn't give an account of himself. Many's the impromptu trial and hanging we had."

"Do you remember," asked the fiercely mustached individual at Uncle Dan's right, "the night we caught the three cattle-thieves up here, 'bout ten miles above Xantus? We'd been lookin' for 'em for some time for they were noted criminals. When we got 'em we made short work of

'em, you bet! Just drew 'em up on horseback, tied the ropes round their necks under the big tree, and then licked the horses up."

"How terrible!" ejaculated Marian turning white.

"Well! Why wasn't that as good a way as any?" said Gus.

"We may have to try that plan here, as things look now," growled the morose stranger.

"Everybody was considered a suspicious character at that time, unless he could prove himself otherwise," went on Uncle Dan, "but all they demanded was that a man should show a clean record after landing in Texas."

"They were pretty sure to ask, 'What have you done to be obliged to come down here?'" broke in the other man.

"Well, they didn't insist on an answer; if a man showed himself square after settling here," laughed Uncle Dan. "You were too young to go off on those long drives, weren't you?"

"I went on one, only," was the answer. "I was quite a kid, though, as you may imagine. We went through the Indian Territory. It was awful hot weather, and one night, as I was taking my turn lying down to sleep,—for you see," he explained turning to Marian, "we rounded up at night, and half the boys sat up all night on horse-

back, round the big circle of cattle, as they've got to to-night, and the other half slept on the ground,—well, as I was saying, as I was lying there I was surrounded by Devil's horses."

"What's a Devil's horse?" interrupted Marian.

"A great big, old green bug that looks like a live sawhorse, with a head like a giraffe and purple eyes that turn on a pivot. Folks said as how their bite was deadly poison. That night I was covered with 'em, and kept brushing 'em off as gently as I could for fear they would bite me. I can tell you I put in an awful night. I never expected to see the light of another day. Since then I've heard that they weren't poisonous at all."

"As a matter of fact they never bite anyone," said Uncle Dan; "but they scare you into a spasm just to look at 'em, but come, let's go out on the veranda. We've sot here long enough, and then we've got to get things ready to hunt for that dead greaser to-night."

CHAPTER IX.

THAT night the moon rose clear and bright in an unclouded sky, illuminating the fields till they were nearly as light as day. The twelve expert riders, seated firmly on their prancing steeds and surrounded by the yelping hounds, made a fine picture and one which appealed strongly to Marian's artistic nature. She felt as if she were in a dream, and at any moment the scene before her would vanish from sight.

"What do you expect to catch?" she asked Jay, as he advanced to greet her.

"Oh, foxes, wolves, possums, and jackrabbits," he answered gaily.

"You notice that he speaks of them all in the plural," laughed Tom. "It won't surprise me at all if we don't see a beast of any kind."

"I don't know why not," retorted Jay. "I'll get that old fox that's been living on my chickens, or I'll bust something."

At that same moment, Hyslop, who was one of the party, remarked to Gus in an undertone,

"It's just as I expected; Picarda's off again, and old S. K. has evaporated, and Tyro, the only decent Greaser on the place, is missing."

"Dead?" asked Gus shortly.

"I fear so, but Packer's all right. He was just grazed by the bullet. I'm a little bit shy of Jay, and Tom won't help us against Joe, though he'll do anything else he can. I don't blame him for that, either. He's his cousin, if he is a lowdown cuss."

The party started off in high spirits, and a daring ride it proved to be, through the roughest kind of country, over fords and ditches and stones. Marian, afraid to ride as fast as the rest, lagged behind a little, guarded carefully by the faithful Tom and the persistent Jay; but, in spite of her confidence in their watchfulness, she often clung desperately to the pommel of her saddle, as the horse climbed a steep incline in the moonlight.

"Hist!" said the voice of one of the hunters, and instantly every horse was reined in, and every one was on the alert as the hounds with one accord bounded forward, baying deeply; then followed a series of angry growls in the distance, then a wild, almost human scream.

Bess galloped off in the direction of the disturbance, followed by most of the hunters.

"I don't want to see any poor animal killed," said Marian reining in her horse.

"I do, if it's that fox that's been eating up my chickens," and Jay hurried off after the rest of the company.

"I've killed three rattlers, and am tanning the skins for you, Miss Marian," said Tom, drawing nearer to her.

"Thank you so much," murmured the girl feeling a little self-conscious.

"They are getting right plenty down here now," he continued. "You're liable to see one most any time. We'll have to turn some hogs into the pastures."

Marian curled up her feet, and looked down at the ground apprehensively.

At this moment Bess came galloping back, wearing a long fox tail in her hat.

"Marian," she called, "I want to talk to you a bit. Come alongside of me."

"I just wanted to get rid of him for a moment," she said noting Tom's look of annoyance. "Don't you be scared now, but they found Tyro dead in the bushes. I suppose you'll want to go back home, won't you?"

"Yes, indeed. Let's go at once," and Marian shivered.

"I'll speak to Harry and Jay,—or would you rather have Tom take you back?"

"I don't care. Only let's go at once. I want to get home as quickly as possible. You see I'm a bit of a tenderfoot yet," and she smiled faintly.

Just then Harry and Jay rode up to the girls and the reluctant Tom was obliged to yield to Hyslop's impatient call, and gallop in the other direction.

CHAPTER X.

"STOP, thief!" rang out a boyish voice as a horse and rider dashed by him in the darkness.

"I'd know that voice in the darkest night, Walt," called Jay, reining in the horse so suddenly that he reared. "I've just got back from Xantus and am hurrying to get home before my horse drops dead. You're a smart little cuss to know me so quick in the dark," he added affectionately.

"Say, Walt," he said, as if moved by some sudden thought, "are you still stuck on that new girl over at Luce's?"

"No," answered Walter laconically.

"That's right! Leave her for Tom and me to fight over," went on Jay.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say, and you tell Tom I said so."

"You'd better tell him yourself; but you don't think you can scare Tom, do you?"

"We'd better talk it over together, sure

enough," said Jay, leaning over the side of his horse.

"I should think it would be more to the point to talk it over with the girl; or isn't she going to have anything to say about it? It's my opinion she wouldn't have either of you,—leastways, not yet. Tom says that himself."

"So you-all have been discussing it, you doggon little ninny you!" roared Jay, straightening himself up, while Walter jumped back in astonishment, and said to himself, "He's drunk."

"I'll wear you out directly," Jay ejaculated, addressing the impatient horse, then struck him over the head and held him tightly with the reins as he reared almost perpendicularly. "You tell Tom," he called back, as the horse's feet came down to earth, and the animal dashed forward into the darkness, leaving Walter once more alone.

"He must have heard bad news in Xantus," the boy mused with trouble in his heart.

"Hi, there!" called a startled voice. "We near had a concussion, sah," and Nigger Ned drew rein. "Dere are a couple ob hoss thieves supposed to be a lurkin' in this remedyate vicinity," went on the darky, "an I was commanded to go in search ob you. Ma dog has been sniffin' wid his ole probiscus in th' air all de ebenin' an'

it's my belief he smells a rat or a hoss thief somewhere's. A party has been organized to sleep out of dos an' another possum to guard de house. Miss Marian 'lows she'll hab a six shooter on her dresser, an' Miss Bess she's gone all ter pieces."

"That isn't a bit like Bess, is it, Ned? She's got more nerve than any girl I ever knew. Where's Bill?" he demanded, a sudden suspicion crossing his mind.

"Still in Xantus. Drunk, I specs," said the old man briefly.

"And Jay's been drinking, too. Do you reckon Jay knows anything about Joe, Ned?"

"I'm satisfied he ain't no ways aware of his present location, and he don't want ter be. He was too drunk to think about anything but Miss Marian. Marse Tom sent me over to get 'em to put him to bed, an' see that things are tended to. Mr. Jay was boun' to find out where Mr. Joe was. He does love him, sure enough, an' Mr. Bill, he just made him drunk to steer him off. Marse Tom's hurryin' home from the Luce's now, an' he wants you to git too. There's enough there without you, Boss says, an' you're needed at home."

At these words Walter dashed off without further parley.

At the Luce ranch, all was excitement. "You

must sleep with me, to-night, Marian," moaned the trembling Bess, clinging to her cousin. "I'm just sure Joe's comin' to kill me."

"Nonsense!" said Marian consolingly, her courage rising as she felt her cousin's need of her. "It isn't Joe, Bess, it's only a horse thief."

"Only a horse thief!" gasped the girl. "Don't you know what that means? It is a man who is running away from justice, and who's trying to steal a horse to get away faster—to Mexico, South America, or any old place, out of the way of the law. A man who's probably up for murder and would shoot you quicker'n 'scat,' rather than be taken. Never dare to go off any long distance by yourself while you are down here, Marian."

"All right. But, Bess, I never expected to see you afraid of anything."

"You don't know,—Oh, you don't know! Where's father?" moaned Bess.

Marian listened intently, but there was no sound except the beating of her heart, and her cousin's low moans.

"What did your husband do, Bess? she whispered.

"Oh, nothing much," Bess returned, raising her head with an attempt at calmness. Then with sudden impetuosity, "I'll tell you, Marian.

He's killed several men, for one reason or another, then capped the climax by forging a note. The man found it out, and was going to have him up for it, when he suddenly disappeared. Now he's a regular outlaw and thief; the most dangerous one in this country. Me and Bill are the only ones who can give him away. Don't ask me how. He has reason to trust Bill, but I left him when I found out how bad he was. He's afraid of me, and he's mad at my leaving him, and he swears he'll kill me if I look at another man, though I've got a divorce, all right. Don't you suspect Jay of any wrong. He's innocent of it all, but he does love Joe, who is the only one left to him of his family."

Marian had hardly thought of either Tom or Jay that evening but with a start came the thought which had occurred to Water, "Did Jay know anything about his brother, and if so, would he protect him?"

By this time, Bess had grown much calmer; pushing the heavy hair back from her face, she crossed over the window and looked out.

"Come, honey, we'll go to bed," she said; and gradually they went to sleep and slept until the early morning hours, when they were awakened by voices under the window.

"Anybody dead this mawnin', boys?"

"Nop."

"No shootin'?"

"Nary bit."

"Thank God!"

"We guarded you with our lives, Boss," called Gus, galloping up. "Not a peeper did we close, but not a sound did we hear."

"How is it at the Carruths?"

"All serene, but Nigger Ned said 'Snorter' and 'Sneezer' had gone from the field."

At this intelligence a loud laugh greatly relieved the tension in the minds of the two girls.

"That's one on old Jay. How's his head this mawnin'? Serves him right! Nobody can look after your place as you can yourself."

"Say," said Uncle Dan thoughtfully to Gus, "how did it happen Jay had his two best hosses out in the field? Pretty discriminatin' horse thieves in their selection, to take the two fastest horses in all the country round," and he shook his head dubiously. "All right up to Mayberry's?" he asked.

"Yep. May's just got back. Said it was too poor pickin's up to their place, for the thieves even to call and pay their respects."

Wild Bill, looking more unkempt than ever, and evidently half drunk, galloped up, closely followed by the sheriff.



“Say,” said Uncle Dan, “pretty discriminatin’ horse thieves.”

"Why, Bill, I thought you'd reformed," laughed Gus.

"I reckon you'd take a little to brace you up if you'd been chasin' round after a horse thief all night," growled Bill.

"We're going after Tom and Jay to take Bill's place," the sheriff informed them. "Bill's tired, and Tom's the best man in the country for that kind of business. He'll keep his head on him," and he glanced with contempt at Bill.

"You can't get Jay—he's in bed with a raging fever," explained Walter.

"Very convenient fever," sneered the sheriff.

"What do you mean?"

"What I ain't telling, young man," returned the sheriff, "but now I'll go after Tom."

"Tom says you can do what you like to him, but he won't have any hand in the capture of Jay's brother," continued Walter.

Bill looked pleased, and the sheriff roared, "Who said anything about Jay's brother?"

"Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all," quoted Gus.

"You can't call Tom a coward," said Walter turning to him angrily. "Many's the time he's risked his life for just this sort of thing, as you all know."

"Gus didn't mean Tom was a coward," inter-

posed Uncle Dan gently. "We all know better, but I think he has a wrong idea of duty."

"Tom'll have to testify when he's brought to trial," broke in the sheriff obstinately.

"He ain't caught yet," snarled Bill with a look of defiance. "I s'pose I'll have to keep on with you if you can't get no one else."

"Oh, I almost forgot," he added, turning to Uncle Dan. "The yellow fever is raging at San Antonio. Piper and Irving" (two boys who had been sent there on business the week before) were ordered out two days ago, but they stayed to the roping contest, 'lowing they could get out, quarantine or no quarantine. Orders were given to shoot anyone caught leavin' the city, and Piper got shot in the leg trying to crawl out through the bushes. Irving's got the yellar fever, and they're both in a bad way, as there ain't enough nusses to go round."

Bill waved his hand and galloped after the departing sheriff.

Marian clasped her hands together, feeling her brain reel with the swift events, and wishing herself back in her own safe, quiet home.

"Do you know what I think, Gus?" she overheard her uncle say in a tone of deep concern. "I think Piper'n Irving stayed for something more important than roping contests."

CHAPTER XI.

FOR three days after the yellow fever scare in San Antonio Aunt Phoebe had daily fumigated the house and all the inhabitants thereof with sulphur, and had furthermore ordered each member to wear around his neck a small piece of asafedita. One cold norther would be enough to kill it, and this third morning the household awoke to find it full upon them.

"Yellow fever'll die a natural death if this keeps up," remarked Aunt Phoebe at breakfast.

"So will the rest of us," laughed Gus as the boys huddled around the stove and blew on their cold fingers.

"Why, this isn't cold," exclaimed Marian. "One would think it was below zero to hear the fuss you're making. I thought we were never going to have any winter; now I suppose it's set in for good."

"No, not what *you* would call winter," said Gus. "We shall have this norther for a day or two, then it will come out hot as ever. The roses will still bloom and the fleas still bite. One suf-

fers more in Texas, however, when it is moderately cold, than you do in zero weather up North. You see the houses are so thin, with no plastering; then our blood is thin. You would laugh to see the people when the thermometer goes down to thirty, all bundled up to the chin, as if they were in the Arctic region."

"But then in our winter," broke in Hugh, not willing to have Gus take too much of Marian's attention, "we're liable at any time to have sudden changes. Why! I've known sweat to freeze right on my face."

"That is remarkable. Evidently the climate partakes of the Southern temperament," said Marian much amused.

"How's yer Honey, now, Miss Marian?" drawled Bill.

"Which one?" inquired Gus, "Tom or Jay?"

"Oh! Tom's lost out altogether," laughed Hugh.

"I have a great regard for both of them" answered Marian lifting her head with dignity. "They both know that my liking is merely a friendly one, and they have no desire to have it otherwise."

"Oh, we're all satisfied of that," sneered Bill.

"P'raps you'd like to beat their time," spoke up one of the smaller boys.

"You kids need squelching," snarled Bill, glaring at them, "and that reminds me—Jay says if you turn his saddle again, or play any more fool tricks, Boss'll need another hand or two right soon. He's goin' to watch out fer you."

"What does Tom find to talk about with you?" pursued Bill, when the laugh had subsided. "He's mighty bashful with girls, and ain't no great talker anyhow."

"He is a very intelligent man," replied the girl seriously. "I have never found him at loss for a subject of conversation."

"Now, Bill, if you've got through asking questions, you might answer a few," broke in Hugh, noting Marian's embarrassment. "Where'd you get that durned little purp you brought home with you after Joe Carruth's escape?"

"It belonged to the sheriff," he answered curtly.

"If Tom had gone along instead of you, Joe wouldn't have escaped," volunteered Hugh.

"Nor Bill neither," sneered Jack Packer.

"What in H—ll do you mean by that?" thundered Bill, jumping up in wrath.

"I mean that my cousin, Kit Packer, would not have been killed," answered Jack calmly, looking the infuriated man square in the eye.

"You'll take that back!" yelled Bill whipping out his six-shooter.

Marian sprang to her feet, feeling an impulse to rush in between the combatants, and prevent bloodshed.

"Come outside," said Jack, glancing at her, "and we'll settle this."

"No! you don't either of you leave this room till you've shook hands," called out Aunt Phoebe with decision. "Such a scene as this in the house of one of the best families in Texas! It's disgraceful. You've got to take it back, Jack—I can't spare you. Then you know they want you for sheriff. Do as I tell you, and don't be foolish."

"How can I take it back?"

"'Cause, Jack," interposed his friend Fritz, "it's a thing you've no right to say, when you ain't sure. You can't hint a man's a murderer, 'thout someone saw it done."

"Well!" replied Jack grudgingly, "I'll take it back and ask your pardon, Bill;" and he held out his hand.

"All right," mumbled Bill, stalking out of the room without touching the proffered hand.

"He'll never forgive you for that," said Aunt Phoebe sadly. "You're an awful good boy, Jack, but you never could hold your tongue and in this country that's a mighty dangerous thing."

CHAPTER XII.

"NIGGER NED is at the door," announced Bill, re-entering the room. "He brought in the mail, and a bunch of assorted news. Irving died last night of the fever. Piper is getting well. One of Joe's pals is caught; he's to be tried right away, and either Bess, Tom, or Jay, or perhaps all three, have got to go and testify. I'm suspected of having had a hand in the death of the sheriff,—but before God! boys, I swear I didn't kill him.—Miles Kyle is the new sheriff, but cheer up, Jack, sheriffs are short lived in this country."

"Picarda!" muttered Gus.

"You must ride over to the Mayberrys and take a letter to Tom from Dad," Bess whispered to Marian with white lips. "It may mean life or death to me."

Marian put her arm round her cousin and led her from the room, wondering in her heart what she ought to do.

"Will you go, Marian?" said Bess, stopping and looking fixedly at her.

"Yes, if you will go with me."

"And will you beg Tom to testify in my place? He would do it if you asked him."

Marian hesitated. Was it not putting him in great peril? "No," she answered after a moment's thought. "I will go with you but cannot take the responsibility of influencing him either way, even if I felt sure that I could."

"I reckon we'd better drive over," urged Bess, knowing that her cousin's firmness would make any pleading useless, "then we can take the things Maw has been wantin' to send over to Mrs. Mayberry."

The norther was not as cold as it had threatened to be, and Marian felt that weather was quite mild when she and Bess started out in a small run-about with a pair of young, half-broken horses. Bess being a skilful horse-woman, and as strong as a man, Marian felt perfectly safe in her hands.

"I'd never dare drive those horses alone," she said, noting with admiration her cousin's dexterous driving.

"No, I reckon not," answered Bess absent-mindedly.

They forded the river and Marian alighted once or twice to open and shut gates, for in the present cattle country there are many rivers to ford, and many gates.

They had reached the third pasture, where the boys were busy rounding up the cattle for the inspection of the cattlemen who were to arrive in a day or two. They had already been several days collecting them for miles around, and now all that were needed were in the third pasture.

"Mornin', ladies," drawled a gentle voice, and the gallant Harry, from Jay's ranch, now recognized by all as Bess's sweetheart, rode up to the carriage.

"Oh, Harry!" cried Bess. "I'm in a heap of trouble."

"Well, get up behind me here and tell me all about it," said he sympathetically.

"Yes, I will, and you can take me home. Marian, you can go on easily from here, alone," said Bess, glad to escape interviewing Tom.

"But I don't dare drive these horses. I can't do it, Bess."

"Oh, yes you can, girlie dear,—there's nothing round here to scare 'em," and before Marian could remonstrate further, Bess leaped into the saddle behind Harry and they were gone.

There was nothing to do but continue the journey alone, and with mingled indignation and fear Marian took up the reins and drove on, her gaze riveted apprehensively upon the horses' heads. All went well for a time, then a bull took

it into his head to give a loud bellow which startled both Marian and the horses. Away went the frightened animals, heads erect, snorting like angry bulls themselves, over little mounds and valleys, the carriage swaying with imminent danger of upsetting, while Marian grasped a rein in each hand and pulled vigorously. At first she was in deadly fear, but as the horses rushed on, fear gave place to a certain wild exhilaration. The horses gave no indication of lessening their break-neck speed, when she heard the sound of galloping hoofs behind her and a voice cried out, "Get in front, there, and grab their heads!"

Half turning, but still pulling back on the reins, Marian saw ten or more cowboys coming on at a flying gallop, lying nearly flat on their horses as they leant forward urging them to their utmost speed. As might have been expected this had the effect of still further frightening the runaways. Marian tried to shout, "Keep back, you only make them worse!" but she doubted if they heard her. Standing erect in the carriage, she grasped the reins even more tightly and leaned back with her whole weight. The horses, unable to bear the strain of the curb-bit, reared and backed, and at the same moment Jay Caruth, who had reached the side of the carriage,

threw his bridle rein to the nearest man and sprang into the rocking vehicle.

"Brave girl!" he said, taking the reins from her soft hands which were already bruised with the hard leather. "You certainly were brave, Miss Marian," he reiterated, looking with admiration at her heightened color and the wavy ringlets of her hair. "I expected a city girl would faint dead away, or have hysterics, if she got run away with.—Steady there, boys! Don't you try to cut up any more capers or I'll wear you out!—You feeling all right now, Miss Marian?"

"Yes, indeed!" she answered with a nervous little laugh. "But I'm glad you came along just as you did."

"So am I; but how did it all happen? Why did you-all try to drive these young bronchos? They ought not to have let you."

Marian explained the circumstances and Jay looked very sober.

"That's just like Bess," he murmured.

At the next gate stood Picarda, looking as if he had never done a day's work in his life and never meant to, as is the manner of Mexicans.

"Open that gate!" shouted Jay.

"Me no understand," grinned the man.

"Well, you understand this, don't you?" and Jay drew his six-shooter.

The man turned and lazily walked toward the gate, which he opened and then closed after them.

"Now understand this, too," continued Jay. "Here's two bits and here's the gun. If you want the money, get up on your old bag of bones and come along; if not—" and he held up his gun threateningly.

The Mexican made no reply in words, but swung himself gracefully into the saddle and ambled along.

"Look at that horse's tail—all stuck up with cockle-burs," laughed Jay. "The lazy devil'd have him all covered like St. Sebastian before he'd pick one of 'em off." Then as he still eyed the odd little rider and his nag, Jay's expression gradually changed to one of concern. "I wonder what he stuck himself there for," he mused, half aloud. Then turning to Marian he added, "He was bound he wouldn't budge, too, wasn't he?" whereupon a short conversation in Spanish ensued, haughtily imperative on the one hand and sullen on the other.

"He's decided to go all the way with us," Jay finally informed his companion; then added, "I want him under my eye."

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. MAYBERRY and her two sons were in the garden together when Marian and Jay appeared, followed by the Mexican. While the two ladies were exchanging enthusiastic greetings, the men were engaged in leading away the indignantly protesting Greaser. The boys reappeared, however, to welcome their guest who then, remembering her errand, handed her uncle's letter to Tom. He read it silently, then passed it to his mother.

"Jay," he said earnestly, clasping his cousin's hand impulsively, "it will be a terrible thing for me to testify against Joe, but it had better be me than you."

"I understand that, old pal," answered Jay huskily. "As for me, I wouldn't do it if they killed me; but—" and his face brightened, "neither of us will have it to do, Tom. He'll never be caught, he has too many friends about here."

"Oh, I earnestly hope for the sake of you all, that it will turn out so," cried Marian. "I

couldn't bear to have anything happen to any of you. I wish my father were here, he'd know just what to do."

"I'll bet he's all right," declared Jay with enthusiasm. "Say! how many men has he killed?"

Marian was obliged to admit that in that respect he was not up to their standard.

"I reckon I'll go up there and get him to make a lawyer of me," said he. "Do you think he would like me, Miss Marian?"

"I am sure of it," she answered, blushing.

"And me?" said Tom in a lower tone, with a meaning look.

Marian was spared an answer by Mrs. Mayberry: "Don't ask any more foolish questions, boys. Come and see my garden, Miss Marian."

"After all," murmured Walter to her, as they turned from the place, "it isn't the question which one your *father* will like best."

She gave him a quick look, half amused, half resentful, and followed his mother.

"Our poor little ranch," that lady was saying, "looks very trifling beside the fifty square miles covered by the Luce's, or the hundred of the Carruth's; but I love my little home and my garden."

"And it evidently requites your love and

care," Marian responded, looking about her with admiring eyes, "your garden is a veritable fairy-land of beauty."

"Except that your garden is more luxurious your ranch is just like Uncle Dan's only smaller——"

"They are all about the same," Walter explained timidly, "even to the little nigger cottages."

"And the Algerita bushes—my Algerita's, how I love them!" Marian interrupted.

Tom eyed her fixedly taking mental note of her fancy for these blossoms, and rejoicing in her enthusiasm, and her capacity for enjoyment, hoping, perhaps that it might denote a capacity to love in the deepest and greatest sense of the word.

After a short walk they heard Aunt Dinah call from the open door, "Come right in to dinner," and she led the way hospitably.

"Will you ask a blessing, Walter?" Mrs. Mayberry said calmly when they were all seated at the table, whereupon the embarrassed youth murmured a benediction.

"Here, one ob you huns da, come open dis do'," called the voice of Aunt Dinah. "I done got my skyart caught, an' I'll be spillin' dese onjins directly." A moment after she appeared at the table bearing the onions, while behind her came

one of her pickaninnies with a platter of fresh beef.

"These onions were planted on the increase of the moon," observed Mrs. Mayberry with an arch smile, "according to Aunt Dinah's advice."

Aunt Dinah rolled her large eyes with delight. "Yassum," she said proudly. "An' you jus' look at 'em! Ain't they magniferous? De moon hab lots to do wid the affairs ob humans. De sun, too. I allers give my chillern their medersun when de sun goes down, or when its just risin', according as the misery is in their head or their feet.

"Get away from ma feet, you little black nigger!" she added in an aside to her offspring, who had tripped on the rug. "You air the beat-enest for a well-brought up nigger! You ac' like you was po' white trash an' never done see a cyarpet; you get around dat-a-way, an' I'll go dis-a-way."

"You should hear Aunt Dinah tell ghost stories," said Tom.

"Yah, yah, 'bout live ghosts. Your eyes would jus' bug right out o' yo' head!" chuckled Aunt Dinah, delighted at the notice she was receiving.

"That will do, now, Dinah," said Mrs. Mayberry gently, and Aunt Dinah bustled from the

room, whereupon the conversation took a more serious turn.

The party were all exercised over the news in Mr. Luce's letter. It informed them that through a private correspondence he had learned more of the particulars of the adventures of Piper and Irving. They had stayed, not for the roping contest, but to join in the pursuit of the fellow who was caught and imprisoned that evening; that Irving already had the fever though he was not aware of it, and that Piper had been wounded in this adventure and not in any attempt to leave the city. The wound was but slight, and he would be home in a few days with a more detailed account of this—to him delightful,—adventure; furthermore the ranchmen were cautioned to watch out for any idle-looking unknown negroes, Mexicans, or even white men who could not give a plausible account of themselves.

All looked deeply concerned. Marian studied Jay's averted face long and hard, but could glean nothing that might either alarm or reassure, and then turning to Tom, who leaned towards her responsively, she said in a tone full of sympathy.

"This is a life which must tend to make one old before his time."

"It is for a fact," he answered. "I feel like I was old enough to be your father, I have had so

much responsibility and you seem so free from care. The constant worry makes one old, and the lonely life, too, leaves more time for reflection. A ranchman never knows at what moment a horse may fall and throw him, an angry bull stick him, or a shot fired from behind a bush end his career. To him life is elemental, its problems simple. He knows nothing about hundreds of things that perplex men in large cities. His companions have the same aims and desires, and there is very little competition; his enemies are open ones, and his only protection from them a quick eye and hand. He does not need to learn or to practise any subtleties of mind in order to discover those he ought to have for friends and to attract them, nor to protect himself against those whose conflicting interests make them his foes. Here, the cows are our principal companions, and if their society lacks brilliancy, they are free from envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness, which you may have to encounter in the society of more fascinating human beings."

"Wouldn't you prefer more variety?" asked Marion, regarding him with increasing admiration. His face had become positively radiant, so that Jay's in comparison was dull and heavy.

"What an inward fire the man has," she meditated.

Meantime Tom had framed his reply: "It isn't a matter of what I prefer," he returned sadly, still gazing at her intently, as though he would gladly read her mind. "My place is here, I am not fit for anything else, and I have others dependent on me. I might love some girl enough to follow her to the ends of the earth, but it is a woman's place to follow her husband, and as I have nothing to offer her anyway but myself, if she couldn't love me enough——"

"Oh, quit getting so sentimental, Tom," Jay interrupted at that point, while Walter looked troubled. "I'd go anywhere the girl I loved wanted me to go and risk her loving me enough. I reckon anyway, Miss Marion, I'll go to New York and get your Dad to make a lawyer of me."

"What do you say to that?" Marian asked, turning again to Tom.

"I say," he returned evasively, "that I must get out and see what the boys are up to. Wouldn't you like to help us, Miss Marion?"

"Why, yes," she answered gayly. "Wouldn't you like to have Mr. Carruth, also?"

"Of course. I need you both. Jay, you go over to the pasture with Hank, while I take Miss Marion this way."

Mounting the horses Hank had saddled for them, the four started off.

"I've ridden your 'Old Buster' so often now," said Marian "that he comes when I call, and follows me about the field like a dog."

"You'll get him to be like his master, not able to get along without you," answered Tom sentimentally. "I'm worrying now, Miss Marian, about the time when you will leave us. It'll be like cutting off an arm or a leg to have you go away."

"You Southerners do say such pretty things!" she murmured in confusion.

"But you know I mean that, and vastly more," persisted Tom. "I couldn't tell a woman I loved her unless my very soul was hers, and I shall need all my strength and force to go on with my work here if I love a woman who doesn't love me. There are all kinds of Southerners, as there are all sorts of Northerners; and please remember that the ranchman does not meet many ideals."

Marian's heart beat quickly and a warm color surged over her face, but she said nothing, and they rode on for some time in deep silence. Presently Tom stopped, turned in his saddle, and, holding up his hand, listened intently, as did Marian also. Not a sound did they hear but the occasional lowing of the cattle. Then Tom

raised his voice in a series of demoniac yells, to which he received no reply.

"I must go to the Cedar break," he said turning to Marian, "for one or both of the boys may be hurt; you stay here, and if anything happens blow this whistle;" and off he started at a gallop.

Marian, alone in the field, looked on all sides at the great stretch of prairie, relieved only by an occasional clump of cedars, and bordered in the distance by low hills. She tried to realize, even to a slight extent, the monotony and lonesomeness of a cowboy existence. She began to see, also, what a temptation there must be to drink and gamble, when there was so little to interest or amuse young men full of the love of excitement and adventure. Her heart went out to the man who had just left her. "It must be seldom that one finds a man so constituted that he can choose out of such a life only what is beautiful and good. How near such a man must feel to the heart of nature," she said to herself, and all the while her eager ears and eyes were on the alert for some signs of human life. Even in these few moments, the extreme lonesomeness of the place awed her.

Soon a moving speck appeared in the distance, which approached slowly, and presently there

came into full view the Mexican who had accompanied her and Jay to the ranch that afternoon. As he galloped toward her and it dawned upon her who he was, she became too terrified to observe or to reflect upon the fact that he rode then, instead of his own wasted animal with the decorations of cockle burs, one of the fastest and best of the Mayberry horses, also that he had added considerably to his toilet, that he held something concealed and that he had in his hand, under his long cloak, a shining new revolver; this last she noticed as he stopped in passing and pointed its muzzle directly at her.

"If you make a sound I shoot," he said with a strong accent.

Marian did not move, but the man still stood and held her under the cover of the revolver.

"You promise not to tell you see me or I shoot," he continued.

Marian gave the promise in a tone which was scarcely audible, but it evidently contented the man, for he dashed on quickly, and was scarcely out of sight when Tom reappeared bearing across his saddle a very young calf.

"He is too weak to walk," he explained, "and I must take him down to the pen where we can look after him."

Marian did not answer. She tried to smile,

but her attempt was so forced that Tom asked quickly, "Are you all right?"

"Yes, indeed. What was the trouble back there?"

"Oh, a couple of Greasers were bothering the boys by refusing to do their work as we wanted it done. They were making such a noise fighting, that they didn't hear me call."

Marian felt that there was a purpose in the action of the Mexicans, namely, to aid in the escape of their confederate and she realized that this success had perhaps saved some valuable life. Her first impulse was to ask about the prisoner and in some way to cause Tom to return to his stronghold, but fear for his safety prevented her.

They rode on in silence, Marian regaining her usual confidence and feeling of security as she gave herself up to the enjoyment of the scene and to the influence that this calm, silent man always exerted over her. As neither of them felt inclined for speech, they rode on in silence until they reached the pen. There they halted and Tom stretching out his hand pointed to a massive beast standing nearby.

"This is our registered bull," he exclaimed proudly. "He is a full-blooded Durham, with a pedigree as long as my own."

"Do their necks get thick in proportion to the length of their pedigrees? Let me try to rope one of them, won't you? It looks easy."

"Certainly, but not on these cattle. We will go into the lower pen, and you can experiment on some of the no 'count beasts. Now grasp this rope just above the knot. If you want to throw high, swing it over your head this way," and with apparently no effort he swung the rope (which was always coiled up on one side of his saddle) around his head, and threw it over the horns of a cow that was at that moment placidly chewing her cud near them.

"Now get off your horse," he said jumping off lightly himself and holding his hand to help her. "I'll show you some roping. I can rope you without hurting you a bit. You're not afraid, are you?"

"Not in the least."

"Well, then, walk along quickly; I will catch you round the shoulders." In a few seconds she felt the rope drop gently about her arms.

"Now go where you will, I will throw it around your feet." In a twinkling Marian was bound hand and foot.

"Now watch old Zip," he laughed after he had released her. Zip, the dog, eager for fun, bounded away, barking loudly and looking be-

hind him. His two hind legs were caught, then the body, and finally the fore legs,—wherever Marian requested the rope to fall.

“The running roping you will see at the contest.” Tom’s eyes were shining brightly with the pleasant exercise and his companion’s evident admiration.

“Now, try it yourself. Rope that old bull over yonder with his back to you. He doesn’t see you, and so will stand still.”

Marian, with the help of Tom, who put her hand in the right place, awkwardly fumbled with the heavy rope, and walking almost up to the peaceful old bull, to Tom’s great delight, managed to throw it over one horn.

“Pull it up quick!” he roared, but the advice was wasted for the bull, feeling that he was caught, gave an angry snort, jerking his head in such a way that he threw Marian flat on the ground. The bull, pulling the rope from her grasp, promptly stamped. Tom sprang forward, but the small herd of cattle, feeling there was danger for them also, and desirous of escape, stamped in a body over Marian, lying face downward on the ground, too suddenly for Tom to render the slightest assistance. When the last one had stepped carefully over her, Marian sat up too weak with fright to rise.

Tom was clinging to the fence, white as a ghost. "My God! I did not think you were still alive!" he gasped, and to his intense relief, Marian laughed excitedly.

"I think every last one stepped over me," she replied, rising, and standing before him a very muddy and forlorn object.

She declared that she was too eager to witness the round-up to desert the field for a matter of dress, and accordingly, after the two had worked together for some moments in removing the outer coating of mud, they remounted their horses and rode away to the scene of action. They soon came in sight of an immense herd of cattle all gathered in a circle, and around them at regular intervals, the boys on horseback. Some of them sat as if half asleep. Many of the cattle lowed sadly. Once in a while an animal would give a sudden start as though to break away, then the guard would be on the alert at once, for if one cow should take the lead the whole herd might stampede at once. Some of the boys were laughing and telling stories. Their number was constantly augmented by other cowboys, driving small bunches of cattle, or pulling along a refractory animal by a rope thrown over his horns. All were commenting with interest upon an approaching thunder shower.



“Marian moved nearer to Tom.”

"There'll be right smart of lightning and a good deal of noise, but it will be over quickly," Jay answered to her apprehensive questions.

"We'll get home to-night, all right, but there'll be some fun when the lightning comes."

At the same instant there was a blinding flash and a deafening peal of thunder, and a desperate struggle ensued between the cattle and their guardians. In a second all was dark again.

"I'll see that everything is all right, Tom," cried Jay in a generous mood. "You look after Miss Marian," and away he darted around the immense circle.

Marian moved nearer to Tom. "I'm afraid," she whispered as the rain fell heavily, the thunder pealed and the lightning played round the horns of the terrified cattle.

Taking her hands in his, while old Buster stood like a statue, he assured her that there was very little danger, and listening to his comforting words, she felt a great sense of peace steal over her. For a moment she shut her eyes, conscious of the cool rain, the pressure of the firm hand, the rich odor of the algerita, and a delightful sense of security.

"The animal heat draws electricity," he explained as the quick storm was over, and the sun came out hotter than ever to furnish the

natural means, and one fully adequate, to dry off the garments of the healthy young people.

"Was there really no danger?" queried Marian.

"Not much, except to the cattle."

"Only one cow dead," reported Jay, riding up to them.

"That is quite wonderful," exclaimed Tom. "Thank you heartily, Jay, for all your help this afternoon." He felt very grateful for the opportunity he had enjoyed.

"It isn't a circumstance to what you are doing for me all the time," replied Jay, and the two looked into each other's eyes with all the old time affection, as they all rode on together to inspect the dead cow. No horse willingly approaches a dead body of any kind. The series of snorts and shying, the sundry kicks and yells which followed as several of the boys tried to get near the fallen animal, proved that fact conclusively. Not so the cattle. Slowly and sadly the few scattered ones moved towards the carcass, at first one alone which with low heart-rending moans, seemed to call her companions, then one by one, all came gravely up with lowered heads, pensively moaning.

"A regular wake," mused Marian.

"It will give the buzzards a job after the live

beasts are driven away," remarked Jay prosaically. "But, Miss Marian, I reckon it's up to us to hike back to your uncle's ranch, or he'll be out gunning for me."

All this time, Marian was listening for some news of the escaped Mexican. Finally, unable to bear it any longer, she whispered to Tom, "Do go and see if that Mexican is still there."

Tom answered with his usual calmness, "We didn't want you scared, Miss Marian, but the boys have just told us that scamp has vanished with my best horse, my new revolver and precious dark lantern. Jay will get you home all right, for he's gone in the opposite direction, and there are too many of Boss's men along the way for him to trust his neck near the Luce ranch."

"Tom looked pretty blue," Marian suggested as she and Jay were once more alone together.

"I reckon he didn't like to lose his good hoss and that new pistol," the other returned, "and then he's upset about this whole business."

"Picardo seemed dreadfully anxious to get away——"

"You bet he did, especially after his pal was caught in San Antonio. Those cattle are none too true to each other."

CHAPTER XIV.

"ALL is," Hyslop was heard to remark the evening after the visit to the Mayberry ranch. "That feller's getting away from Tom as he did last night will make a big stir when it gets to town. It's lucky Carruth lugged him along with him as he did for he was doubtless in touch with some of the others. You know that the other fellow got away from the jail after all when they thought they had him so pat in San Antonio."

"No!" exclaimed Mr. Luce.

"There's going to be a reform this year in politics; there'll be the biggest turning out at election that there ever was," Hyslop informed him.

"You're the political boss for your district, ain't you?" asked Mr. Luce.

"Yes, I reckon I am."

"They think Bill killed the sheriff, don't they?" continued Uncle Dan, changing the subject. "He swears he didn't and I believe him."

"You're right in believing him," answered

Hyslop with an emphatic nod. "Don't do any talking about it, lie low, and get your girls off somewhere till this storm blows over. We've got to get those men now, dead or alive,—but remember, the less said the better."

"Uncle Dan, I will go back to New York if I am at all in the way here," said Marian entering the room just in time to catch the last remark.

"No, dear," returned her uncle affectionately, "we need you very much to look after my poor girl. She is in a dreadful state of mind, and your Aunt Phoebe is afraid to leave her old fool of a husband. She would go, of course, rather than let Bess go alone, but you can look after her and take her mind off of her troubles. I want to send you down to Athens for a short time. Now who can I send along with you-all?"

"Can't we go alone, Uncle Dan? I'm so glad to be of some use. I do love you all so much," and she embraced the old man fondly.

"Of course you can't go alone, child," he said, patting her arm tenderly, "but Tom and Jay, with some of the best men, have got to go on the cattle drive to-morrow when the cattlemen get round, and Gus must stay here with the rest of the boys to guard the ranch."

"Why not let the girls go on the drive with us?" suggested Hyslop. "I reckon it'll be an

experience you won't soon forget," he added, turning to her, "and you look as if you could stand the exertion," and he gazed with admiration at her strong, erect figure.

"I should like it above all things!" exclaimed the girl, with sparkling eyes. "Oh, Uncle Dan, do let us go!"

"They can hear my political speech, too," urged Hyslop, as though advancing an unanswerable argument in favor of the plan.

"And Jones' temperance lecture," added Uncle Dan with a chuckle, at which the other looked injured. "Well, they can stay with Mrs. Houston, till you go on to Athens and then go along with you," assented Uncle Dan, and the matter was settled.

"Get up, laziness!" called out Aunt Phoebe bustling into Marian's room early the next morning with two substantial looking packages in her hands. "I've got your duds into your trunks and they're all ready to go down on the truck. "Get up, there, Bess!" she added to her daughter who had been sleeping with Marian for some time. "Your poor mother looks after all the work on this place and gets out of bed every mornin' at five o'clock, while you find it hard work to drag your lazy carcass up at seven. I ain't agoin' to have any more of this settin' up

all night, and lyin' abed all day. Now you just hustle. I've put you-all's lunches in these paper sacks, and you can pack 'em yourselves."

"Where shall I pack them?" inquired Marian wonderingly.

"Carry them, I mean. Don't you-all understand English?"

"Not that kind," answered the girl saucily; then, throwing her arms round the good lady, she said, "Now, Aunt Phoebe, you're just pretending to be cross, to hide your real feelings. I've caught you at it before."

To her surprise the old lady burst into tears, and turning to one side wiped her eyes with the checkered apron.

"What made you do all that work for us?" asked Marian softly.

"I like to work," she answered, still wiping her eyes. "I'm used to it, and I don't want Bess to get old and ugly from overwork as I did. It isn't the work—I'm only worried about things, and I shall miss you girls so."

"We won't go a step, if you talk that-a-way, Maw," said Bess softly.

"And you're not old and ugly, you're a handsome woman," stoutly asserted Marian; and, in spite of the manifest absurdity of her assertion,

Aunt Phoebe looked pleased. Vanity dies hard in the feminine heart.

Marian had by this time finished her simple toilet, and stepped out on the veranda to watch the preparation for the cattle drive, leaving Bess and her mother to their parting words.

"Harry, Joe, and John, you go on the side yonder," she heard Jay call out. He seemed at this time to be the master of ceremonies. "Bert, Doc, and Dan, you come on this side. Harry you take Bess on your side, and look after her, and Miss Marian can stay in back with me."

The cows were drawn up in a line which reached nearly out of sight. Far ahead she saw the figure of Tom Mayberry galloping swiftly here and there, and recognized men at intervals along the line, from all three ranches.

"Tell the niggers to ride in behind, in case I want them," roared Jay at the top of his voice; then turning, he saw Marian, and springing from his horse he advanced to the veranda to meet her, drawing off his riding glove before extending his hand to grasp hers.

"Good-morning," he said. "Do you still feel equal to this undertaking?"

"Indeed I do."

As she looked into his handsome face, she noticed more earnestness, with little lines of care

which she had never before observed. She wondered if there were really a change or if she had only glanced at him carelessly before.

"I'm all ready," called out Bess, coming out on the veranda. "Go in and get your breakfast, Marian. Where's my horse?" she asked, pulling on her gloves; then, vaulting into the saddle as Nigger Ned brought up her steed, she dashed off to interview Tom.

"How well she appears on horseback!" said Marian, her eyes following her with admiration.

"Oh, yes. Like all the rest of us, she looks better on horseback than anywhere else. We ought to do all our courting from the back of a horse," he answered.

"Come, Marian," called Aunt Phoebe; and the girl went in to take a hasty breakfast, after which she said good-by to Uncle Dan.

As they started on the drive, the three hundred cattle were straying along in an irregular line. Now and then one would walk off to one side, and an alert cowboy would dash after it, to send the truant back to the line. When they came to clumps of thorny bushes where Marian could see no opening whatever, the boys, protected by leather jackets and trousers, would dart into them without hesitation.

"I just begged the cattle to keep out of that,"

laughed Marian as Harry came to her assistance, "but they wouldn't listen to me."

"You're so pretty," answered the boy, "they clean lost their heads."

"You certainly are sweeter than ever in that sunbonnet," said Jay, with admiration at her flushed face. "I reckon we'd better rest here for a spell. You-all must be getting tired."

They dismounted under a large tree, and Marian leaned back glad to rest.

"How are you getting along?" inquired Tom riding up and placing his leather jacket between her shoulders and the rough bark of the tree.

She gave him a grateful glance, and leaned back again, feeling the sense of peace and contentment which his presence always seemed to bring. She wondered why the famous men she had met had never impressed her as did this uncultured youth. As she watched him, Whittier's lines came to her,

"Nor frock nor tan,
Can hide the man."

Tom was speaking, but she had heard nothing of what he said.

"If you all talk at once, she can't sense anything," called Bess as she swung from her horse

and dropped beside her cousin leaning against her affectionately.

"Well, what difference does it make?" answered Harry lazily. "Joe, chase up that gentleman helper on the right. He is disposed to wander."

As they continued their journey, the boys broke into snatches of cowboy ballads.

"Be careful, boys," called out Jay, half fearing that Marian would hear something of which she would disapprove.

"I want to hear one of those ballads I have heard about, with seventy-nine verses," she begged.

"Well, call up that old nigger on the left and tell him to sing 'Boll Weevil,'" commanded Jay; and the darky began a melodious chant.

"Now for a love song," cried Marian as the sounds died away.

"Are love songs interesting to you?" asked Jay, giving her a meaning glance.

"Of course," she answered frankly, and Jay called out,

"Tom, come up here and give us your song."

So Tom drew near and in a musical tenor, sang a touching ballad, beginning,

"I've crossed deep waters for you, my dear,
What more could a poor man do?"

"That is Tom's favorite song and he composed the words himself," said Jay, as Marian expressed her pleasure.

"I didn't suppose he was a poet," she answered in surprise looking after Tom as he galloped off.

"Oh, we indulge in a few pastimes besides drinking and gambling."

"Tom never feels the need of the latter amusements, does he?" asked Marian.

"He's human, like the rest of us," laughed Jay. "Luckily for him, he's poor and has to work the greater part of his time. Still he gets out and hollers on certain occasions—plays a few tricks on the boys, off and on, and gets licked at poker once in a while; in fact, whenever he goes in for a game. He has such measly luck at cards, he sure ought to be lucky in love. No! Tom never posed as a saint. He's just what you see him, a big, strong, dandy good fellow. I mean to beat his time if I can, but I won't dodge the fact that he's white clear through. You don't want a man to be an angel with a tin halo, do you, Miss Marian?"

She did not answer, but, instead, as they were passing a large pecan tree, said,

"What small branches the pecan nuts grow on! How in the world do you gather them?"

“ Well, we don’t gather them much round here, except those that are on the ground; but I believe it is done in some places by captive balloons. You see the branches are so delicate they won’t bear a man’s weight; (this remark was intended as a joke) but look ahead. It’s a pretty sight, isn’t it? ”

Before her was a long stretch of red cattle, with now and then a spot of black or white, the tossing of myriad horns, the cowboys ever on the alert, dashing here and there on their agile little horses, their lithe, active figures well set off by their easy costumes. The wide fields of heavy green grass, the brilliant red and yellow flowers and the deep blue of the southern sky added color to the picture. Her cousin Bess looked like a veritable Diana, as she rode with easy grace by the side of the handsome Harry.

“ Oh, why must any one be shut up in a city! ” exclaimed Marian. “ What a truly wonderful country this is! ”

Jay’s eyes shone with pleasure as they rode on in a silence broken only by the lowing of the cattle or the distant songs of their drivers (for they had fallen far behind the others).

Marian felt the fascination of the man beside her and in her heart acknowledged him fully the

peer of any man she had known in the city of New York.

Then, taking up the reins which were hanging loosely on her horse's neck, she flashed a quick glance at Jay, as she said archly, "I thought you were going to New York to study law."

CHAPTER XV.

AND now the weary and disheveled cavalcade had reached Xantus, the cattle had walked up the inclined plane to their respective cars, and the crowd had scattered to go in groups of two or more in search of something to eat and any possible excitement that offered. Marian naturally found herself between Tom and Jay, Bess bringing up the rear with the faithful Harry.

"Aren't you tired, honey?" asked Bess. "It was a pretty long ride for you to take."

"You ought to have driven in the truck part of the way, with Hyslop," added Tom, regarding her with concern.

"Oh, I'm not a bit tired," she answered brightly, "and I wouldn't have missed any part of the ride for the world."

"Hyslop's saving his strength for his speech," laughed Jay. "He's a regular howler when it comes to a stump speech, and he's bent on reform, this year."

"This old hall has seen lots of good times, hasn't it, boys?" broke in Bess.

"What hall? That old barn?" cried Marian in astonishment.

"That barn,' as you are pleased to call it, my lady, is the Public School and Town Hall combined. Many a good dance have we had in it," Tom explained.

"Does 'Brother Butler' love little boys who dance?" she asked archly, for she knew Tom and Jay were his especial pets.

"He loves us in spite of our faults," said Jay gayly, for he was evidently in the highest spirits. "Sometimes I'm tempted to quit dancing just to enjoy his pleasure over it. I shall take it into serious consideration soon—about forty years from now. In this building we are now passing you will have the pleasure of listening to a political discourse in which your party will be torn to shreds, also a temperance lecture, the Lord willing and no man objecting. This is the post-office on our right, and there is the drug store over yonder;" and he pointed down the grass-grown street to a number of plain board shacks.

"Why, are we already in the town?" she asked in amazement. "'In the very heart of the metropolis,' to quote Gus, and it's a good brisk day for business. Behold the crowds!"

Sure enough, the two little side streets contained lines of vehicles of every description,

many more saddled horses, and round the broad veranda of the one large provision store lounged cowboys, Greasers, and various nondescript individuals, all chatting merrily, with a good deal of noise and ostentation. Among the loungers Marian recognized one or two of her companions on the drive. Now and then a lank woman or two passed in or out of the store, and a short distance away was a group of negroes.

"Are you too tired to go out this evening?" asked Tom. "You girls will have to keep busy to see all the sights. We are going to supper at Aunt Mary's and she'll want you to go to the prayer meeting afterward; then there's a roping contest to-morrow. I hope nothing unpleasant will happen while you are here. We mean to get you off south before there's any lynching."

Bess turned pale, and Jay gave a troubled glance in her direction; but Marian, hardly noticing the remark in her interest in the strange sights before her, declared again she was not a bit tired.

Aunt Mary and her pretty little daughter, Henrietta, welcomed them with much warmth, and made them feel at home at once.

"Here's a distinguished visitor who arrived before you," said Aunt Mary, pointing to Hyslop, who was seated on the parlor sofa, busily en-

gaged in making notes in preparation for his political speech. At this announcement he rose to welcome his friends.

"I hope you-all enjoyed the drive," he said to Marian.

"I haven't words to express my pleasure in it," she replied and he nodded his head with a satisfied air.

"Come right out to supper," called Aunt Mary, "you-all must be half starved. You can talk at the table."

As they sat at the table, Marian studied her hostess. She was much like Mrs. Mayberry, but without her air of inborn nobility. Hetty, the little cousin, was a sweet, dimpled maiden of eighteen, with an evident admiration for her two cousins, Tom and Jay. Marian felt that she loved her at once.

"Who's going to church to-night?" asked Hetty as they rose from the table. "Are you all too tired?"

"Not a bit of it. We're all going," answered Tom. "May I take you, Miss Marian?"

"She has already promised me that pleasure," broke in Hyslop with an important air.

"Well, Jay, I'll have to go with you," laughed Tom, but Jay's brow was decidedly overcast.

"What does that fool want to butt in for?"

he growled in an undertone, glaring at the unconscious back of the triumphant Hyslop.

At the door of the church were many of the companions of the drive, as they found nothing more exciting than the prayer-meeting on hand for the evening. Doc grinned as he saw Hyslop's satisfied air and Jay's lowering expression.

"Temperature's fallen since morning," he remarked to his friend. "Seems as if there was another in the running. I thought Jay was ahead."

"Bill says he's losing out, and is bettin' on Tom," said the other.

Upon entering the bare little church, Marian looked about her curiously. Could religion be anything but austere if nurtured in such a place?

"You'll see Brother Butler again in a few moments," whispered Tom, who was seated behind her. "I hope he will explain as usual that 'Baptize' means immersion and is proof positive that one can go to Heaven by no other road."

"Don't be flippant, Tom," whispered Jay with unwonted seriousness, and Hetty looked at him with reproof.

Marian recognized many of the faces and costumes she had seen previously at the prayer-meeting. They all looked at her with evident curiosity.

"Hope you'll enjoy the music," said Hyslop with a grin. "Some of the organ notes don't go, and some sound all the time. Sometimes the organ stops short in the middle of the singing, and it generally emits a few groans when the singing is over."

"Unconscious criticism," murmured Jay.

Marian saw with surprise that "Sin Killer Jones" had entered with Mr. Butler, and sat beside him on the platform behind the pulpit. Just then the choir filed in, sitting in the organ loft at the end of the church and gazing about as if, now they were there, it was quite time for the service to begin. A silence fell on the congregation as Brother Butler rose and asked the blessing of God on the service about to be held for His honor and glory. Then he gave out a hymn, reading it all through in a somewhat monotonous voice, with a rising inflection at the end of the first line, and a falling one at the second,

"Shall I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease."

The congregation rose and faced the choir, turning their backs to the clergy, but Brother Butler's voice could be heard as he sang the hymn with great heartiness. Sin Killer Jones

did not sing, but sat regarding the congregation with a menacing look, as if he would willingly become the instrument of the wrath of God towards them.

"I wonder if he repels other people as he does me," thought Marian, and glancing about her as they sat down, she noted a half-amused expression on some faces, though most of them showed only blank indifference.

The people loved Brother Butler, however, and there was a slight stir of disappointment when, after the prayer, he announced that one far more able and worthy than himself had kindly consented to address them.

"Now, my friends," began Sin Killer Jones advancing and mopping his face with a large red bandanna handkerchief, "as it is a very warm evening, I will make my discourse shorter than usual."

"Amen," came from a deaf member, who was apt to fill all pauses in the sermon in this manner. The preacher glared in his direction and proceeded with his address, which in spite of his introductory remark lasted for three-quarters of an hour. It was thrilling and to the point, but hardly comforting to sinners. At its close "Brother Bean" was requested to pass round the plate.

"Where at," murmured the good brother looking for it in vain, to discover it finally under Doc's feet.

"Say, Doc, don't that old raw-bones always give you the cold shivers?" whispered Harry. "He plumb scares me and makes me feel like I'd got to hurry up and repent."

"Shucks! He don't know any more about a future life than we do. Anyhow, the Lord knows we don't get much of a show down here," answered the philosophic Doc.

Tom had been watching Marian intently during the sermon, wondering if it would ever be possible for a girl like that to care for him. He misinterpreted the satisfaction in Hyslop's face, but as they left the church he whispered eagerly, "Say, Tom, I'm glad that old sinner is down here. I've got pretty near enough evidence to jail him, and I'll just keep my eye on him. He's a great one to preach repentance."

During the walk home Jay was quite willing to take charge of the ladies, while Tom and Hyslop behind them discussed matters of great importance to the whole community. They felt that the co-operation of all able men was needed to avert the dangers that threatened them from the band of outlaws.

Jay was more than usually debonair. Nothing

could trouble him at that moment, but the fact that he could not have Marian all to himself. He felt, however, that he could afford to be patient, for her encouraging remark upon the drive and the smile which accompanied it, made him feel that she looked upon him with a favor she had shown to no one else.

CHAPTER XVI.

"I'm glad we waited over for this," said Marian ecstatically, as she took her seat on the rickety grand-stand between her cousin Bess and Mrs. Houston.

"I enjoy watching it once a year," answered Mrs. Houston. "It's only at the County Fair that we manage to get enough people together for a really good tournament and roping contest. I hope our boys won't get hurt. They usually carry off all the prizes," she added proudly.

"I can hardly wait for it to begin. I'm so excited!" exclaimed Marian, and as crowds of men and boys walked into the inclosure she watched eagerly for Tom and Jay, humming unconsciously, "I've crossed deep waters for you, my dear."

"Here come the contestants," she called out joyfully as she ceased her humming and leaned forward eagerly.

"The which?" asked the irrepressible Bess. "Isn't Tom grand, Madge?"

"Oh, always Tom! I think Jay is just too fascinating."

"Why, Marian! don't you like Tom?"

"Of course I do."

"Jay is too small for you——"

"I don't see that one inch is an inseparable barrier," Marian snapped out with unwonted force.

Hetty looked up in surprise. The timid little southern girl had not been accustomed to speak as freely as the independent northern girl. While she admired her unassuming frankness, her bright intelligence and thought her accent charming, she felt a little shocked at her freedom of speech concerning a subject which she herself never broached except with the greatest reverence.

"Would you marry a man shorter than yourself?" inquired Bess intent on provoking her cousin, in which attempt she succeeded admirably.

"We weren't speaking of marriage," she answered with spirit. "I wouldn't marry any man, whoever he happened to be, and live outside of New York."

The controversy was ended as the boys who were to run in the tournament formed into line, their strong, athletic figures being a goodly sight.

Five poles stood in succession on the track, each one bearing a ring suspended from the top. Every rider held a long pole like a lance in his hand and was to remove the rings by running this lance through them while riding at full speed.

The first rider started and came at a rapid pace. He missed the first ring, speared the second and third, then the fifth, drawing up his horse so sharply at the turn that he nearly fell over backwards.

"Good! Good!" rang out from the crowd, and the next rider started at full gallop, carrying off three of the rings. Then the Tadpole achieved some glory and a lame wrist. After him came Harry and one or two strangers, all with fair success, but not one carrying off all the rings. Then came Jay and Doc, who each got four, and were loudly applauded. Now Walter advanced.

"How fair and slender and boyish he looks!" cried Marian while Mrs. Houston leaned forward anxiously.

"Go on, Walt!" yelled the boys, and on he rushed, carrying off the first, second, third, fourth and fifth, amid deafening applause. Marian stood up, waving her handkerchief frantic-

ally as Walter wheeled his horse and rode by the grandstand, carrying the blue flag.

"Isn't Tom going to try?" she asked in surprise as the line broke up.

"No!" said his aunt. "Not this time. He pretends it's to save himself for the roping, but I know him;" and she smiled tenderly.

"Wasn't that grand?" cried Jay as he rode up, his eyes shining with excitement.

"Yes, indeed. Now you must win the roping contest," she called back, tossing him the rose she held in her hand, which he caught and fastened to the side of his sombrero.

"Step this way for the grandstand!" shouted the gate-keeper. "Right smart of people here," he added in a lower tone to Hyslop who stood near him. "All the notables in the country; and look at the ladies! It just does me good to see so many of 'em together. God bless 'em."

Against the fence opposite was propped a half drunken Mexican yelling excitedly.

"Hurrah for Gilly Jakes! He's the d—dest son of a gun, and the best feller in this country. May he win this race."

"By all the gods! Picarda!" gasped Hyslop as he recognized him. "Of all the brass, this is the limit—the 'ne plus ultra' so to speak."

"Do you suppose Jakes will really have the

cheek to show up?" he continued turning to his friend.

"Why not? He hasn't an idea that we even suspect him. Get Picarda off quietly, then lay in wait for Jakes. If you get him, you'll have the whole gang. Gosh! but it's cruel we can't have the help of Mayberry and Carruth! How can such men be kin to Joe? Keep the Mexican in sight, and watch your chance. Here come the men, but Jakes isn't among 'em."

During this side play our friends were waiting impatiently for the roping contest to begin. Marian was listening in half amused interest to the conversation of two men near her.

"I holler for Tom Mayberry," one of them said positively. "He'll win. He always wins everything he sets out to. He just naturally flows through any kind of an obstacle. Do you remember the work he done when he was sheriff?"

"Yes. What in h—ll did he give it up for?"

"Why, he was afraid he'd have to arrest his cousin, Jay's brother, you know."

"Jay's my man," the other said just as emphatically. "Look at him. There's a stocky young Hercules for you. I don't care if he has got a no-count brother. He's as good a man as Tom Mayberry, in his own way. And—Lord! Hain't he got a temper!" he added in tones of

the deepest admiration. "Do you remember the day he hung his gold watch up on a tree and shot it all to pieces, 'cause it wouldn't go? Things has just got to go with him, or there's trouble you bet!"

"Look! They're leading in the bulls!" called Marian in excitement.

"You act like you'd never seen a bull before," said Bess rather crossly.

"Here come the men," cried Marian unheeding her cousin's remark. "How strong they look!"

She saw the rose in Jay's sombrero, but could not hear Tom humming, "I'd cross deep waters for you, my dear."

"Let's do a little betting," called out Bess. "I'll bet six bits on Harry."

"I'll double that for Jay. Won't you bet on Tom, Mrs. Houston?" But that lady smiled as she shook her head reprovingly.

The Judge called out the name of Giles Jakes, one of the champion ropers of the state. A huge bull was let out of the inclosure, and the customary tin can fired at him. Giles held his prancing horse firmly until the bull had run his fifty yards, then horse and rider dashed forward as if shot out of a cannon. As they neared the bull the long lasso, which had been coiled in the

rider's right hand, went whistling through the air, and settled upon the great beast, which went down with a thud. Jakes and the horse together made a quick pull backward, and, without touching the saddle, the man sprang to the ground, the horse holding the rope tight while Jakes with a smaller rope tied first the hind legs, then the fore legs of the prostrate bull. Quickly slipping the rope from the horns, he held up both hands as a signal, "It is done."

"One minute and a half!" roared the judges, followed by a burst of clapping and a chorus of cowboy yells, but the Mexican was not there to enjoy his triumph.

The next man was, according to general verdict, "rotten," "limp," "doggy."

"Oh! Take me home to Mamma!" called Jay's champion, after a few others had made one slip or another in starting too soon, allowing the bull to escape before being tied, or not catching him at all.

"They'd shoot men like that in the low country," growled a man near them.

"They talk big about shootin' on the prairie," retorted Bess, "but when it comes to the real thing, I reckon we can shoot some up here."

"Why do they allow poor ropers to compete?" asked Marian.

"Anyone can enter the lists who pays the fee," explained Mrs. Houston, "and then it's somewhat dependent on luck. It depends much on the horse, and the particular bull, as well as the man. I have seen very skilful ropers go all to pieces in a contest. We have some expert throwers round here, and they are well known, too," she added with pride.

"That fool ain't one on 'em, then," interposed the sociable individual indicating the performing roper before them. "He couldn't get to do it in a year."

"The bull's going to chew him up directly," answered his friend. "Now we'll see something," as the baffled roper retired discomfited and advanced to take his place.

The weary spectators straightened themselves and then bent forward expectantly as Jay dashed after the bull, catching him with one throw, and tying him up in just a minute, amid prolonged cheering.

Harry Newman came next. He succeeded in roping the bull but his horse fell, sending the long, slim figure of his owner over his head; but he was up in a jiffy and the bull was caught and tied in one minute and fifty seconds, in spite of the mishap. Then poor Harry limped off

amid uproars of praise and exclamations of encouragement.

Doc's bull, with an unexpected jerk, tore the young man from the saddle, leaving him sprawling apparently lifeless on the ground, his horse standing over him. A hush fell on the spectators as his friends gathered round him.

"It looks like he was hurt bad," said the communicative gentleman.

"Only a sprained ankle, a bruised wrist, and a little finger broken," roared the judge as Doc was assisted from the field. "Let the next man come on."

"It really is a cruel practice," said Marian trembling.

"It is indeed," assented Mrs. Houston, "and the feeling against it is growing so that it may soon be forbidden and roping contests will be a thing of the past. Moreover, the animals which are roped are almost valueless afterward, except for killing and eating. The boys in the fields rope a cow only to lead her; they never throw her, as they do at these contests."

Now the name of Tom Mayberry was called, and Marian's heart beat wildly. Her nerves were getting at high tension, and she gave an unconscious little spring as he darted like an arrow after the flying bull. One quick throw, a

sudden spring, a few rapid movements, and his hands went up in just thirty-eight seconds from the start.

"Wonderful!" gasped Marian. "I've lost!" she said, turning with beaming face to Bess, while Mrs. Houston's countenance glowed with pride in her nephew.

Bess, who had apparently lost all interest in the contest after Harry's mishap, brightened a little.

"I lost on Harry, but won on Tom, so I'm six bits ahead," she said.

"That last was plumb fine," said Tom's champion. "I reckon his piety ain't spiled him a mite. You-all from the low country can't beat that nohow," said he turning to the stranger who had no more to say.

"The three prizes are awarded to Mayberry, Carruth and Jakes," called the Judge; and amid storms of applause Tom rode up to the Judge's bench, waving a blue flag, followed by Jay with a red one. The Judge waited a moment, but Jakes did not appear.

"Will someone look for Jakes?" roared the Judge. At that moment a small boy rode up to the Judge's bench and handed him a letter. After reading this the Judge called out, "Jakes has left town on business. He will receive his reward through our agent. The contest is over."

CHAPTER XVII.

"WHO do you suppose is in the next room?" asked Bess of Marian the afternoon after the roping contest.

"Can't imagine."

"Why, that slick looking man we saw yesterday at the roping, talking with Tom and Hyslop. I reckon they'll ask him to go to the sociable with us to-night."

"But, Huns," interposed Hetty, "don't you know it's raining and there won't be any sociable?"

"No sociable!" exclaimed both girls in disappointment.

"But, Miss Hetty," said Marian in surprise, "this little drizzle won't make any difference, will it? Why, in New York, we wouldn't even call it rain."

"No one ever goes anywhere down here if it even looks like rain. We-all can't stand what you northern girls can," and Hetty looked with admiration at Marian's superb figure.

Meanwhile in the adjoining room a conversation of much greater importance was going on.

"We got them easy," chuckled Hyslop. "Picarda thought he was being arrested for drunkenness and making a disturbance; but Jakes was the surprisedest man I ever saw. Thought he was being pinched for carrying concealed weapons I reckon. He looked around and saw there wasn't any help for it and came along like a lamb."

"I interviewed them this morning," the stranger added. "I've got enough evidence about the other to get a warrant out for his arrest. We'll nab him if he shows up at the sociable to-night."

Tom went to the window. "I'm afraid there won't be any sociable," he said in a tone of disappointment. "It's beginning to rain."

"Cuss the luck!" said the stranger. "The man will get away by to-morrow and he's the only one who will give evidence against Carruth. Not a word can we get out of Jakes, nor even Picarda."

"Do you know why?" inquired Hyslop.

"No."

"Well, it's because they know for a dead certainty they will escape if they hold their tongues, and they'll be shot if they don't. Joe Carruth is

protected by a seven-headed dragon, who loves him with all the strength of his terrible nature, and who has no principle and no fear in dealing with his enemies; a man who is sharp enough to keep himself out of danger from the law, who is a wall of strength to his friends and sure death to his enemies. We can never find proof enough to arrest him, but we know the man."

"Who is he?" asked Tom excitedly.

Hyslop looked at him a moment, then in a lowered but impressive tone he answered, "Bill Wilder."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"You must keep your temper on ice to-night, Miss Marian," laughed Jay, as he walked by her side on the way to the political rally the next evening. "You may be prepared for some awful hits at the Republicans and Northern people in general. Hyslop is a red-hot Southerner and Democrat, and he'll say what he's got to say no matter who's there to hear him."

She lifted her head a little proudly. "I don't think I shall be very much disturbed at his criticisms," she answered.

They found the schoolhouse already full of people, many of whom Marian recognized. She cast an almost frightened glance into a dark corner and instinctively drew nearer Jay as her eyes met the bold ones of Bill Wilder. Not far from him sat Sin Killer Jones, gazing about with his usual sanctimonious expression. Near the place where they took their own seats, she recognized in the good-looking stranger, the young companion of Hyslop when she first saw them on

the train, and between them and the door were two other strangers. As Tom came in with his aunt and cousin he led the way to the front of the room followed by Bess and Harry, so Jay and Marian went to sit with them.

"The women seem to be pretty numerous here to-night," a man remarked to the speaker.

"Yes, I wish to heavens they were not," answered Hyslop. "What with that Northern girl here to listen to what I've got to say, and other worries which I can't mention, I never was in such a state of mind in my life;" and he nervously wiped the perspiration from his forehead with his bandanna.

"Well, anyway," answered his friend, trying to encourage him, "this is more of a local mutual improvement affair than a political meeting. We're goin' to get the ear of a lot of these fellows. Some of 'em may be killed off by next fall. The women folks say they are goin' to shut up all the rum shops an' gamblin' dens this year. They've got a mighty big job on their hands."

"When they get it done the bulls'll all be wearin' white robes," laughed Hyslop.

From her position Marian had a full view of the room which seemed to her utterly devoid of charm. There was no covering on the boarded walls, and no backs to the benches upon which

the children usually sat. These benches were now filled with cowboys and cattlemen, in company with professional men, also "the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker," all dressed in the same fashion, and all, with few exceptions, chewing tobacco and looking very uncomfortable because they couldn't spit on the floor. Two old ladies in a distant corner were sociably dipping snuff together. Here was no social distinction. Every honest white man was as good as any other man, whatever his occupation or financial condition. If a few old families took pleasure in holding themselves aloof, thereby proving conclusively to themselves their superiority to others, nobody interfered with their pleasure, for nobody knew of it except the members of their own families.

On the small stove in the center of the room sat the County Judge. He had chosen this spot on account of the convenient aperture into which he could spit; and also because he knew that it would be a popular spot, for that very reason. The crowd which pressed around it proved the wisdom and forethought of his seething brain.

At the table at one side sat the newspaper reporter, and on the table itself lolled several members of the Common Council all deeply engaged in conversation. The speaker of the evening, Mr.

Hyslop, seemed quite unlike himself. His cheeks were hollow, his eyes encircled by dark shadows, and, as his eyes rolled nervously about the room, they visited at frequent intervals the dark corner where Bill Wilder was closely watched by the stranger.

When the time came for him to address the meeting, he rose and faced the assembly with impressive dignity. A deep silence fell on the room. Then, in a voice rich and sonorous, he began. His remarks were emphasized by violent gestures with his long arms, and were abusive or extravagant, according to the subject upon which he touched.

"The Republicans," he said, "are wholly controlled by a few rich men, who insist upon Protection and the Trusts, simply because they put money into their pockets. The great mass of the Republican party are the most ignorant of the people who are proud to be bull-dozed by these nabobs of finance and who would sell their souls to be one of them, as they are now selling their bodies."

"Hear! hear!" and loud hurrahs broke from the audience and several angry glances were directed toward Marian as the representative of a northern nabob.

"Can't you see," went on the speaker, "that

for a few big manufacturers only that protection is a help and that they have money enough to buy their way into politics, or to bribe those who are already there? Can't you see how the Beef Trust is ruining our cattle business? When we ship our cattle to Chicago or St. Louis we can't afford to send them back, so we are at their mercy and have to take their price."

There was an impressive pause during which Marian began to feel that there might be some argument on the Democratic side after all, an idea which she had never harbored before, when the speaker thundered out,

"The Trusts are legalized robbery and the Republicans who foster them are robbers, all robbers! Grinding down the hard working people, half of them through ignorance, the other half through their lack of the Almighty Dollar, the greatest power in this glorious country of ours! Look at Massachusetts. That grand old state, with all her culture and her wonderful history! We are proud of her, but here in Texas we have something greater to be proud of; we have honest men!"

This burst of oratory was received with frenzied applause from the audience. During this noisy demonstration Bill Wilder and his friend Sin Killer Jones attempted to stroll care-

lessly from the room but were stopped at the doorway by the two strangers from the low country and their force was at once augmented by the man who had sat near them.

"In the name of the law," he announced, grasping the arm of Sin Killer Jones, "I have a warrant for this man's arrest."

Bill Wilder forced the man back.

"Don't let Jones escape!" screamed the man, "He is the one who killed Kit Packer!"

The commotion which followed was terrible. Tom and Jay stood by their friends upon the platform where they were immediately joined by the other women in the audience, with the men who had them in charge. Several of the lamps were shot out and in the almost total darkness could be heard the sound of breaking glass, tramping feet, and angry voices.

"Take the girls out at that side door and get them out of town as soon as you can," commanded Hyslop excitedly. "I'll not answer for what the boys will do with Jones, if they get him. That sheriff is an ass. I wouldn't have had him blunder that-a-way for all the world."

"You don't mean that they'll lynch him?" gasped Marian.

"I don't know," he answered evasively, "but

you girls can't do any good, and the sooner you get out the better for you."

"Promise me you will do all in your power to prevent it," she said, turning to Tom feeling instinctively that he was the man upon whom to depend. "I will not leave till you promise that," she added as he hesitated.

"I'd rather see him lynched than have him escape," he muttered.

Marian still looked at him.

"Yes," he finally consented looking her full in the face. "I promise you he shall not be lynched if I can prevent it. Now will you go?"

"Yes," she answered, and Tom quickly led them through the side door. "Hyslop," he said authoritatively, "let the boys attend to Jones; you take Aunt Mary home. Jay, you see to Hetty, and Harry and I will get Miss Marian and Bess down to the station in time for the eleven o'clock train."

"I'll be there in time to say good-by," whispered Jay, grasping Marian's hand in the darkness.

"Yes, do," she answered mechanically, then added, "you will help Tom carry out his promise, won't you?"

"Sure. Now we'd better hustle."

Outside, the street seemed full of a howling mob, which they skirted skillfully.

They had hardly entered the station when Harry and Jay hurried up to them.

"You certainly did hurry," Marian exclaimed.

"You bet we did! Here's your grips, and Harry's going with you. Here comes the train;" and Marian was on board before she realized what was happening. Leaning from the window she held her hand out to Jay who gave it a tender pressure, then to Tom saying earnestly, "You will not forget your promise?"

"Never!" he said seriously, and then the train started, leaving the two cousins together.

"Where are we going, Bess?" asked Marian.

"To Athens, on the Gulf. Aunt Kate lives there. She's Maw's sister," and Bess lapsed into her moody silence.

"We won't let anything happen to you, Miss Bess," said Harry tenderly, but he could win no smile from the girl.

"Athens is a fine city," he went on turning to Marian. "It has a college and churches and theatres. You'll find people of education there, just like New York. There'll be lots of your kind of society, and you'll forget us all in no time."

"I can never forget this night, anyway," re-

plied Marian. "I wonder what is happening at Xantus now. I never wanted to be a man before, but it is so ignominious to be hustled out of the way. If I were a man I'd stop that lynching!" and her eyes flashed with determination.

"Well, it ain't so easy to stop a lynching when the boys are set on it, and if you were a man, Miss Marian, you'd be only *one*, you know," he answered quizzically.

A long pause followed, broken suddenly by the quick stopping of the train, hurried running to and fro by the train officials, then the conductor called out,—

"All change here. Train wreck ahead."

"More dirty work I'm afraid," said Harry putting his arm about Bess and hustling her out. Passing by the wrecked freight cars, and the crowds of people surrounding them, they ran to a train which was waiting a little up the track. A rabble of people were falling over each other in their haste to secure seats and in the confusion Marian found herself separated from her companions.

"I suppose they are somewhere on the train," she thought, "but what could I do if they were not? They have my bag and I don't even know Aunt Kate's last name."

Just then she felt a light touch on her arm,

and turning quickly she saw a man she had seen with Tom at the political meeting. He seemed almost like a friend amid that crowd of strangers, especially as she noted that he held her grip in his hand, so she greeted him with cordiality.

"Harry asked me look out for you, and gave me your grip. He found it was all he could do to take care of Miss Bess. He didn't know who he might meet in that throng. I've been right behind you, but didn't want to startle you."

"Oh, thank you!" she said, "but how did you get here?"

"I followed on the express which was half an hour after yours. Jones and Wilder disappeared in the scrimmage and the boys sent me along to see if they were on the train. I wanted to get back to-night, so it suited me to a T. They weren't on the train, so I reckon the boys'll get them yet.

"But there goes our train," he exclaimed, making a vain effort to get through the mass of people as the train started.

"Won't Bess and Harry wait for us?"

"Perhaps they can't. If they are on the train they couldn't get off, with that gang surrounding it. What shall we do?" and he glanced at her with helpless appeal.

"I'm sure I don't know."

"You don't blame me, do you?" he asked.

"Not at all."

"I hope you're not afraid of me?"

She looked at his somewhat boyish face with ill-suppressed amusement as she answered serenely,

"Oh, not in the least."

"Well, you northern girls are just splendid," he said with enthusiasm. "Suppose we hunt for a place to get something to eat; I'm nearly famished."

They made their way through the crowd to a small lunch room.

"I believe I'm rather hungry myself," said Marian, who began to enjoy her adventure now that her fears were allayed. "Father always told me if I ever fell in love with a poor man, not to let him see me eat. It would discourage him completely."

"Would you really marry a poor man?" he asked sentimentally.

"Of course, if I loved him," she replied in a matter-of-fact tone. "Why don't they bring us some plates?" she added seeing a platter of chops slapped down in front of her by an energetic waiter.

"Ain't that platter good enough to eat off

of?" said the waiter. "Anyway, it's that or nothin'. We're short of plates."

"Well, may I have a fork or must I eat with my fingers?" she said good-naturedly, and he obligingly came back with a fork and a cup of coffee which might well be called a bowl.

"I haven't introduced myself," suggested the man handing her a somewhat spacious visiting card on which was engraved "Charles Osterhandt." "I am an instructor in the law school at Athens. If you will come down to the college I will show you one that will compare favorably with any of your colleges in the East. Where are you visiting?"

"I am going to Mrs. Daniel Luce's sister Kate's," she said, "but I don't know her last name."

"You take it calmly," he answered, looking at her with admiration. "How do you expect to find her?"

"Oh, I'll be sure to find her," she began, but was interrupted by her cousin Bess, who dashed into the room quite out of breath, followed by the faithful Harry.

"We stopped the train and got off when we found you weren't on it," she panted. "They told us they saw you-all come in here, so we came too. They are waiting the train for us, but I

reckon they can wait a little longer while I get a bite to eat. It is wonderful how any excitement will give one an appetite."

Whereupon Bess fell to devouring the rations which Harry had ordered for her, while Marian regarded her with an amused smile on her face. "Fancy," she said to herself, "stopping the cars for one of the passengers to get a lunch." Then thinking for a moment she turned to Osterhandt. "What made you arrest those men right in the midst of the lecture?" she asked.

"Because they were going to stroll out and get away from us," he answered. "I am sorry that we had to make such a commotion but nobody could have done differently."

The company looked sober for a while till Osterhandt remarked with the Southerner's nonchalance,

"The thing to be regretted most of all is that we missed the temperance lecture."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE girls had arrived at their destination in safety, and had been enthusiastically welcomed by "Aunt Kate."

Three weeks had elapsed, in which time the girls had found themselves very much improved in health and spirits. Marian was delighted with the half Spanish city with its narrow streets, its houses built about an open court, the gardens filled with banana trees and brilliant blossomed cacti; the white adobe public buildings glistening in the sunlight, and the pretentious looking University.

Every one in Athens had heard of "Wild Bill," "Sin Killer Jones," of Tom Mayberry, of James Carruth, and of the part the two girls had played in the recent stirring events.

Marian, anxious to learn the outcome of the momentous evening at Xantus, and feeling sure that Osterhandt would know all about it, begged her cousin to go with her to the University. So, under the escort of a very youthful student of the University whom they had met at Aunt Kate's,

they reached the college, to find that Mr. Osterhandt was attending a lecture on Political Economy. "Would the ladies like to step in and listen to the lecture till Mr. Osterhandt was at liberty?" Certainly they would, and they were accordingly ushered into a large hall full of students. Some of these students were busily taking notes, but many of them were leaning back half asleep; a gentle buzz of whispering filled the air.

Mr. Osterhandt crossed the room to them at once and began conversing with them in an undertone, which greatly annoyed the lecturer. As Mr. Osterhandt turned again to continue his note-taking the girls carelessly whispered to their young companion.

"If that young man with his two aunts cannot listen to my lecture he had better leave the room," the lecturer paused to remark, not looking at any one in particular.

Osterhandt was indignant, Bess boiled with ineffectual wrath, the young student was evidently frightened, and Marian, feeling very much ashamed of her carelessness, glanced from under her large hat to see if anyone was looking at them. No one appeared to have heard his remark. The busy ones scribbled on and the lazy ones did not turn their heads. Even the lecturer had his eyes on the floor.

"These people are certainly more courteous than we would be," she thought.

"I wouldn't have had that happen for a pretty," remarked Osterhandt as he joined them after the lecture, "but old Winterbottom is an awful crank."

"We certainly deserved it," said Marian honestly.

"Shall I show you round the college?"

"I'd love to see it, but do tell us at once about Sin Killer Jones."

Osterhandt looked angry. "I hate to talk about it. It's a disgrace to the community. They all slipped through their fingers. Jones, Jakes, Picardo, and even Bill Wilder disappeared. They must get lots of help somewhere, but they can't escape us much longer. The country is too much worked up over their outrages. That wreck was evidently the work of some of the gang."

"Is Mr. Hyslop a detective?" asked Marian in a lowered tone, "and are you interested in the case?"

The young man stared at her with a startled expression on his boyish face. "Where did you get that notion?" he stammered. Then, before she could answer, he added, "Don't, for Heaven's sake, mention such a surmise to anyone else."

By this time the party had reached a room at the end of the corridor. "This is the laboratory," he explained. "The boys are listening to a lecture on the deleterious effects of alcohol. Shall we enter?"

"I think not," she replied. "We might receive another reprimand, and as I never take alcohol in any form I'm not in need of the warning."

"Then you are not afraid of filling a drunkard's grave?"

"She'd fill one all right, if she ever got into it," interrupted Bess.

Osterhandt laughed, but looked at Marian's athletic figure with admiration.

"This is the president's office," he said as he knocked at a door on the left. Hearing a call, "Come in," they entered.

In the center of a large comfortably-furnished room sat a stalwart individual smoking a cigarette, his feet resting upon the desk in front of him, and a large pile of papers on the chair beside him.

As the ladies entered he hastily removed his feet from the desk, threw away his cigarette, and rising, came forward to greet them with fine courtesy, in strong contrast to his former appearance.

"I am very glad to meet you, ladies," he said, giving them seats.

After a short conversation, Marian rose to go, murmuring, "We must not take up any more of your time."

Bess looked surprised and he answered, "My time is yours. I am never too busy to talk with the ladies, and it is seldom we have visitors from the North." Then turning to Osterhandt he continued, "You ought to get up a picnic or some entertainment essentially southern to amuse the ladies; a lynching bee for instance," and he laughed as at a great joke.

Marian shuddered. "We came all too near witnessing a lynching at Xantus," she said, and related a little of the disturbance.

The president looked very grave. "Indeed, Miss Luce," he answered, "any right-minded Southerner would endeavor to prevent such violence, no matter how much the parties deserved it." He turned for confirmation of his opinion, but Osterhandt seemed extremely doubtful.

As they went out they saw everywhere about the spacious college grounds groups of students, lounging or chatting together. Apparently nobody was hurried or even particularly busy. The slow, southern speech greeted her ear agreeably, and she was rather pleased at the absence of

the brisk, business-like air everywhere visible in northern colleges.

"You can't hustle, down here," her companion explained, "there's less oxygen in the air."

Presently Bess and her young escort joined them, and after a few moments, as they entered a narrow part, Marian was left with the young student, while Bess and Osterhandt went ahead.

The boy was evidently a little afraid of this stately northern girl and after an embarrassed silence while he hunted in his mind for a worthy subject of conversation, he burst out, "Wasn't Shakespeare a wonderful man?"

"He is generally considered so" answered the girl, vainly trying to conceal her amusement.

"I like him best in 'She Stoops to Conquer,'" he ventured.

Not knowing whether to take this last remark seriously or not, she compromised by calling attention to one of the trees:

"What is that tree?" she asked eagerly.

"That's a cigar tree. Right smart of them round yar," he replied glibly, feeling he was now on safe ground. At the turn of the path Osterhandt fell back and the youth hastened to join Bess.

"Were you born in the South, Mr. Osterhandt?" asked Marian.

"Why do you ask?"

"I though I detected a Northern accent at times," she answered.

"I believe you are a witch, and I'm half afraid of you. Yes, I was born in the North, but came here when only ten years old. My parents were New England farmers, but when they died I was sent to my uncle here, and fitted myself for the law. I still like farming. I believe the life of a farmer is the most independent in the world. Even when times are at the worst, people have to have the products of the soil, and farmers are about the only men who are really producers. They hold all the rest of mankind on their shoulders. The farmer raises hogs for instance, and sends his barrels of pork to some middle man. The middle man rolls those barrels of pork into somebody's cellar, and makes his living that way; that somebody rolls it into somebody else's cellar and *he* makes a living out of it, too, but after all, that barrel of pork hasn't increased a lick."

"Yes," said Marian, "but your farmer is too busy looking after his hogs to attend to selling his pork to the public at large, so I rather think the middleman is necessary, but if you love farming so well, why did you leave it for the law?"

"Well, it's easier to earn a good living in the

law," he said a little embarrassed at her question. "But tell me how you like our city of Athens."

"It is beautiful. Such a restful, quiet, little city! I never saw such bright sunlight anywhere else, nor such beautiful tropical flowers. Then the people are so kind and genial. I don't mind a bit the high-flown compliments paid me, for I can see that they are not said insincerely, but are the result of a genuine kindly feeling. The men pay just the same attention to their wives and sisters."

"I reckon Northern men love their families just as much, but they don't have as much time as we do and they are less demonstrative. But," he went on, "I reckon you won't find any difficulty in fixing it up, if you'd rather live down here."

"They certainly have been good to me," she continued, not heeding his gallant remark. "Everybody in town called on us the first two or three days, and most of them are giving parties in our honor."

"Don't they do that up North?" he asked in surprise.

"Not to such an extent. I have been to five parties here already. Instead of dropping in for fifteen minutes and drinking a cup of tea as we do at home, we take our fancy work along and

stay all the afternoon, sing songs and do all sorts of pleasant things. Then we have a square meal and spend the evening, and all the men far and near drop in to see us."

"What do you girls talk about in the afternoon?"

"Oh, all kinds of things. Just now the all absorbing topic is the Joe Carruth and S. K. Jones affair. The girls are afraid of their lives. They lock and bar every door at night, and some of them carry bowie knives or revolvers, even when they go out in the daytime. Bess and I are important personages, because we were even slightly mixed up in this last business. They don't know that Bess was ever married."

"Can you keep a secret, Miss Marian?" interposed Osterhandt with a troubled air.

"Certainly I can."

"Mayberry told me I could trust you, but this is in strict confidence. I am interested with Hyslop, Gus and your uncle in bringing those men to justice. Jay Carruth will help his brother if he can, and Tom Mayberry won't take any active part in catching his cousin unless he is driven to it. If we could only induce him to help us we would be sure of success, for Mayberry never fails in anything he undertakes."

"I am puzzled about two things," said Marian

after some reflection, "why is Gus so friendly with Bill and why does Joe Carruth want money when he is wealthy anyway?"

"Poor Gus has played a part he doesn't like much. He is very frank by nature, but he has tried to make Bill confide in him, and we have gotten more information that way than you'd think. Bill likes Gus and really trusts him. But it seems to be the only way to catch those men. As to Joe Carruth,—he is just naturally cussed. He had his share of the land and cattle but money is scarce, and Joe was an awful gambler. Still they had a good deal of money, too. It's pretty hard to tell why people do things. He certainly has harder work now and less money by a long sight, than he would if he'd behaved himself."

Marian's mind was intent on the event of her escape from those same outlaws.

"I owe my escape to Mr. Mayberry," she said, referring to the affair.

"You certainly do. Then the night before, they saw a couple of Greasers hanging round near Miss Bess's windows. We think the Mexican Jay captured, might have been watching for you and Bess."

Marian flushed at the thought.

"Don't you worry, the danger is all over now,"

he said reassuringly. "You won't go back there till those fellows are arrested. In the meantime, keep your own counsel and if you get any new light on the subject, let me know at once. You will, won't you?"

"You may be sure I will," she said with earnestness.

Having reached the door of Aunt Kate's mansion, Mr. Osterhandt turned to greet Bess and her companion, and suddenly remembered that he was the bearer of an invitation for Aunt Kate and the two young ladies to join a picnic given by the students the following day.

One of the most charming traits of the Southerners is their perennial youth. The oldest men and women take the same active interest in entertainments of all sorts, as do the young people. A man is never too old in the South to be very attentive to the young ladies, and to pay them various extravagant compliments. Marian had witnessed with surprise Aunt Kate's dignified husband sliding down the banisters with his children, and only the day before she saw a really old man jump from a rapidly moving car to speak to a young lady who was passing. She was, therefore, not very much astonished when she beheld assembled for the picnic, not only the students and their girl friends, but also the professors



Bess.

and their wives, and even the genial president. The professor, who had delivered the reprimand the day before, was present in gala attire and the most amiable of moods. He begged to be presented to Miss Marian, declaring that he must have been entirely out of his mind the previous day to be annoyed at anything done by two such charming young ladies.

Throughout the long walk the boys were laden down with the lunches and all the wraps of the girls, who took it as a matter of course.

Presently, Mr. Osterhandt strolled up with an attractive looking stranger who was evidently very bashful, an unusual thing in Texas and apt to receive very little consideration.

"Miss Marian," said Osterhandt, "my friend here saw you at the college yesterday and couldn't be happy till he met you. He spent the whole evening in my room raving about you. I never saw a man in such a state before. He wants to know if you've got a sweetheart up North."

The poor fellow blushed furiously and turned an agonized look upon his tormentor.

"Don't mind him at all," said Marian kindly. "No one pays the least attention to what he says."

"I reckon there may be some truth in it,"

stammered the youth, apparently feeling some such remark was required of him, then, as some one called his name, he gladly made his escape.

"That was just horrid of you," exclaimed Marian.

"Oh!" grinned Osterhandt, "I did it for his good. He needs to be roasted till he gets over being so bashful. It's a great bar to success. No I——"

Marian began to laugh, but before he could finish his sentence he was called to settle a dispute, and she was left alone. She started off briskly down a lovely little side path in the woods, glad to be by herself for a time before the horn blew for luncheon.

She took a seat on a fallen tree and was gazing about her with delight at the richness of the foliage and the beautiful flowers when she saw a man coming rapidly towards her from a little side path. As he came nearer she recognized in him one of the two cattlemen who had recently visited her uncle's ranch.

"Good-morning, Miss Luce," he said removing his hat, "I hope you remember meeting me at your uncle's. I have a message to you from him."

Marian examined him gravely as she acknowledged meeting him. His manner was suave and his dress unostentatious, but he had not the bear-

ing of a gentleman. True, she had met him at her uncle's; but he was there on business, and even at that time had not inspired her with confidence. Taking the telegram which he extended she read——

“Come back to ranch at once with Kirkpatrick. You will remember him.

UNCLE DAN.”

Marian looked at the man in serious doubt. Seeing this he pulled another telegram from his pocket and held it out.

“Here's the one I got,” he remarked. The second telegram read,——

“Bring Miss Luce to Xantus to-night on four-forty train. Will meet you there.

DANIEL LUCE.”

“I must first say good-by to my friends,” said Marian.

“Oh, no, you won't have time for that,” the man objected. “You see I have lost about two hours hunting you up. I went to your house and explained it to your aunt and she told me where to find you. I reckon something's happened to the Boss or his wife,” he added watching her narrowly.

"Didn't Aunt Kate send a note by you?"

"No, she reckoned the telegrams was enough, and the time was short."

Marian knew the easy southern ways of doing things but she still felt undecided. "I must certainly say good-by to my friends here," she said rising.

"But you'll lose the train. Something must have happened sure or Daniel Luce wouldn't have sent them telegrams," he urged. "I've got a carriage waiting for you right near here."

He turned and walked down the path and Marian followed in great indecision. At one moment anxiety for her uncle filled her heart, then a wave of distrust toward this man urged her to seek her friends. A sudden bend in the path brought into view a close carriage with curtains drawn. At this sight she decided fully that she would not go with him and stopped short as he advanced to open the carriage door.

"I shall not go with you," she said with determination.

"But what will your uncle think? He must be in great need of you."

"I will attend to my uncle. Don't let that disturb you."

He muttered an oath and faced her fiercely, then, to her surprise, the door of the carriage

flew open and Osterhandt sprang out. At the same moment the driver jumped from the box and the man was seized and handcuffed before he had time for a struggle. He was lifted into the vehicle, Mr. Osterhandt following and closing the door.

"Your party is just over there," said the driver, pointing ahead with his whip. "Mr. Osterhandt says for you to go right along and tell 'em you got separated from him by accident."

Saying this he jumped up on the box and drove off, leaving the astonished girl standing like a statue in the path. Just then the horn sounded loudly only a short distance at her right.

CHAPTER XX.

Soon after, Osterhandt returned to the picnic with an air as gay and light as though he were telling the truth when he asserted that he had wandered off and got lost.

Marian could hardly wait to see him alone; but on the way home she found him beside her.

"We have got the very man we wanted most," he informed her, "was fool enough to walk right into me. But he thought there was no one here that was on to him. The fellow on the box was one of our spies. He induced the man to take his cab, then a second hackman, the other spy, got up on his horse and followed them about town. They did sure enough go to your house first. The man on horseback had hard work to avoid Kirk seeing him, but then he was inside with the curtain down. Then they came here, and Josh (our man) was smart enough to get me while Kirk was hunting you up. Kirk was counting on your not knowing anything at all about any of them. Not many people know anyway that he's one of

the gang. Even your uncle didn't know till lately. He's been doing business here for years like an honest man, and come to find out he's the biggest rascal in the country. Gus found that out."

The next day Mr. Osterhandt called to warn Marian that Jones had at last been captured, that he was in the Athens jail, and that the people must not know it. So great was the indignation against him and his confederates, that the authorities feared some violence. Then he added news that was far more welcome. The evening train was to bring their old friends, Tom and Jay. The young men were to come on important business, but intended to prolong their visit for a few days longer than their duty demanded.

At the news Bess' aunt became quite as enthusiastic as the girls themselves.

"I wish I could have them come right here and stay," ruefully, "but where can I find room! Well anyway they shall come here every night to dinner. And now you girls shall drive down to meet them."

Later on in the afternoon dressed in dainty, freshly laundered muslins, the girls sat in the light phaeton eagerly watching for the evening train.

As it whistled Bess' hand instinctively tight-

ened on the rein but her eyes were turned towards the advancing engine.

Marian was the first to spy the party.

"There's Gus!" she ejaculated—"and Harry Newman," Bess began to take notice, "and here are Tom and Jay!"

A general handshaking followed, and a stream of questions and answers even before the two favored ones climbed into the phaeton leaving the others to walk off to the one hotel in town.

The boys had ordered their bags sent to the hotel, but Tom refused to relinquish a large paste-board box which he held in his hand, and from which emerged a well remembered delicious odor.

"I brought you some Algerita blossoms, Miss Marian," he explained, looking very red and pleased at the girl's enthusiastic gratitude.

"I remembered how you loved them," he continued sheepishly and trying to speak in a tone which might be heard by the two on the front seat. But he concluded from the expression of their backs—which he regarded intently from one corner of his eye—that no part of the transaction had been lost on them.

Marion felt more than ever proud of her two cavaliers, after observing them at evening functions, and in dress-suits. Although not exactly

in the latest cut, such as they were, they wore them quite as gracefully as the New Yorker does his more modern apparel.

In this quaint little community they were very much at their ease, and like all Southerners were armed at every turn in the conversation with a ready tact, and a quick harmless wit in which there was never a sting. The many compliments of the Southerner, if not always deeply significant, spring from a genial desire to give pleasure, and have never a suspicion of sarcasm.

And Tom and Jay were Southerners to the back-bone, possessing all their rich nature, all their virtues, and a few of their genial weaknesses.

These two young men soon became the center of attraction as indeed in point of birth and personal worth they deserved to be. To Bess this was all a matter of course; she cared not a whit for either of them, and she had seen them in Athens before. But to Marian it was something of a revelation, and she became inwardly ashamed of the feeling of superiority with which she had hitherto regarded them.

The two young men were modestly unconscious of their general popularity, and apparently also of Marian's new-found estimate of

them, attributing her change in demeanor to the change in her surroundings.

In the small town of Ray, a short distance from Athens, the annual dance was to take place in a few days. The girls had attended a number of assemblies in the college buildings and at the homes of the friends of their hostess, which were very like such affairs in New York, except perhaps the participants were more enthusiastic in their enjoyment of the exercise; but a real cowboy dance Marian had never seen, and her friends were anxious that she should behold Texan life in all its phases.

At first Bess protested against it, saying that none of the young people of Athens would think of such a thing as attending that dance, but, when it was announced that Harry Newman was to be of the party, she changed her mind, and became correspondingly eager to go.

The one public building which was used both as school-house and town hall, was to do duty on this occasion, by removing all benches and desks, leaving bare board floors and a platform upon which stood a small parlor organ, always referred to as "the instrument."

In accordance with Marian's suggestion, the four agreed to drive over early in the afternoon to decorate the hall. The other young men from

Xantus and the few who would come from Athens were to make the journey on horse-back.

"You watch out Miss Marian," said Jay, "and you'll see the boys from the ranches come in, each with his girl on the same horse, so that no other fellow can get her."

For this occasion the boys wore ordinary business suits, flannel shirts, and bright silk handkerchiefs about their necks.

"We'd be mobbed if we came out in claw-hammers," explained Jay.

The girls agreed to wear simple white muslins.

Marian thoroughly enjoyed the drive over, stopping here and there to gather wild flowers, mistletoe and vines.

The hall looked dreary enough at first, with its bare floors and only one or two oil lamps on the walls, but the girls set to work with a will, and accomplished wonders.

"You-all have made this place a regular bower," exclaimed Jay as he and Tom came in.

Marian was a charming picture, as she stood there in her simple white dress, unadorned except by a bunch of Algeritas at her belt and another in her hair. Tom looking at her, was unable to utter one of the pretty speeches that came so readily to his lips in talking with other girls.

"Why can't you talk, you fool?" he said to himself angrily, but words would not come.

The room shortly became stifling with the mingled odors of flowers, resin, and smoky oil lamps.

A red-haired girl in a startling blue dress sat at "the instrument" attended by a gaunt man with a violin in his hand. Near them sat two Mexicans, motionless and expressionless, their guitars held waiting.

It would be impossible to describe the dresses of the country girls. They were of calico, generally gaudy in color and home-made, and they wore heavy shoes instead of slippers, but youth and happiness lent beauty to their faces.

There were about twice as many men as girls.

"The men pay for the tickets" explained Tom, "but if a man brings a girl, he doesn't pay anything, and if he brings two girls he gets a supper ticket free, but that has never happened yet, and I reckon any fellow that tried it would get lynched."

"But if a girl comes alone?" queried Marian.

Tom stared a moment. "The very idea of a girl going alone to a dance! Whoever heard of such a thing?" thought Tom, but before he could overcome the shyness which he always felt in her presence, sufficiently to give her an answer, Jay

had broken into the conversation, remarking as he eyed a youthful looking stranger who had just entered,

"That's the orneriest-looking white man I ever saw."

Marian, following his gaze, beheld a young man with very greasy looking hair, a strange looking suit of large checks with trousers so long as to almost trail on the floor, boiled shirt, high white collar, no tie and no vest. He smelt strong of camphor, but the light of happiness was in his eyes.

"Watch that collar an hour from now," Tom observed.

"Why?"

"Well! They dance with considerable enthusiasm down here, and an extra collar is an unheard luxury."

"He'll take it off," grinned Jay.

There were all sorts of costumes on the men, from the regulation cowboy outfit with chaps and spurs, to a sort of travesty on a dress-suit, with black trouser legs tucked into high brown brogans, but every one looked happy, and expectant, eyeing the strange girls half admiringly and half suspiciously.

The dance orders contained such names as "Money Musk," "Coming Through the Rye,"

"Lady Washington's Reel," "Step Dance," etc. There were few round dances.

While Marian was engaged in handing her dance order from one aspirant to another, a flourish on "the instrument," accompanied by trills on the fiddle and then a dramatic pause announced that the dance was to begin.

"Seelect pardners for the Seecilian Circle," called out the leader, capering violently about and waving his elbows in time to the music, as he called out the numbers.

"Allemandie Left!"

"Allemandie Right!"

"All forrad and back!"

"All forrad and saloot!"

"Sashey through to the next!"

"Twist Partners!"

"No fair steppin' on her feet!"

At this Tom, Marian's partner, seized her gently round the waist, and began whirling round till the girl laughingly begged him to stop. Leaning against him for support while the others continued to whirl, she gasped, "Oh, what fun!"

Tom was in an ecstasy of delight, but said nothing.

"Seat yo' pardners," called the master of ceremonies, and Tom led her to one of the benches ranged along the side of the room. He

took her fan and waved it violently. While all over the room many colored handkerchiefs mopped as many heated brows.

"Step dance," called the leader after another flourish of music and a dramatic pause.

Jay claimed her for that, Tom bowed and looked after her as she walked away, then went and sat alone in the corner. A man at a dance in Texas can do that quite unobserved.

"I never regretted so much as now," began Jay, "that I am such a poor dancer. I am so stiff at it, you can hear all my bones creak."

"I am sure you must be a good dancer," laughed the girl.

"No! I assure you. Gus says I always remind him of the nursery rhyme,

'Dromedary dancing
Dromedary prancing.
And when they saw the good beast dancing,
They knew it was a sign of rain.' "

Truly as a dancer, Tom was far superior to his cousin.

"Keep a humpin!" yelled the leader, stamping with his feet to increase the enthusiasm. Indeed the step dance seemed to be a jig with no step at all, except as each one fancied, and the time was quite broken up by the flourishes, trills and runs on "the instrument," and the very scrappy

violin. One did well to note only the measured beats of the two wooden Mexicans, which formed a good drone bass.

"Jog along! Keep a humpin'! Keep a humpin'!" bawled the enthusiastic leader increasing his tempo. "Don't hug the girls too tight!"

This witticism was applauded by smothered snickers.

"The collar's gone," whispered Marian to Jay, as she sat waiting to get her breath for the next dance. Sure enough the young stranger had removed that wilted appendage.

The next dance was the Virginia Reel. All the boys not dancing, clapped and stamped in time to the music. The calls were mingled with an excess of wit slightly bordering on the vulgar but not really offensive. The dancers, while waiting their turn, amused themselves by cutting most remarkable pigeon wings and flings, throwing their feet about in a loose jointed fashion wonderful to behold.

This dance over, Marian's partner, an attractive boy she had never seen before, entertained her with his first visit to a city.

"I'd been a livin' out of doors fer six months, and I'd clean forgot how white folks live. When I went into the hotel dining-room, I didn't dare

“speak without fixin’ my mouth just so, till I felt I was gettin’ it twisted all out of shape. I ordered beans, and felt as if every one was watching me eat. I did the best I could, but finally I said to the man opposite to me, ‘I’ve chased that there bean round this plate for half an hour with my fork, so now if you’ll excuse me, I’ll use my knife.’ That night I slept on a spring bed. Gawd! Every time I turned over, I shot two feet in the air, till I got tired and finished the night on the floor. I thought I never wanted to see a city again, as long as I lived.”

Here the fiddler broke in again, “Now boys, hustle and get your girls for the lances.”

Marian was again led out by Tom, who stood by her silent and pensive.

“You don’t seem quite in tune with your surroundings, to-night,” she said.

Tom brightened a little, but the effort it cost was not lost upon her.

“You are worried about something,” she ventured.

Just then at a call from the fiddler, Tom took her hand, and she felt the sudden thrill, and the sense of mastery and protection with which his strong personality always inspired her.

“Don’t let my ugly mood spoil your fun,” he whispered in a pause of the dance.

"You, ugly!" she said in unbelief, then she suddenly realized the trend of his thought.

"You know they have taken Jones," she whispered.

"Yes! But hush. No one must know it."

"Why are they so furious against him?"

"First for killing Kit Packer, who was a great favorite, and also for his hypocrisy in taking good money for preaching the gospel, when he was worse than any of them. When I think of his underhanded villainy, I feel like lynching him myself. He's the worst man in the country. All the rest have some redeeming trait, but he hasn't one. What is the use of wasting time with such vermin?" and his eyes grew fierce.

"It is never right to take the law into your own hands."

"Miss Marian," he said earnestly, "you can't understand these things. You have always lived in a law-abiding, civilized community, and——"

The music came to a sudden stop, and Tom was obliged to lead his partner to a seat, where she was immediately claimed by a bashful looking boy from the college, but she had time to whisper to Tom, "I hold you to your promise."

As the waltz ended Jay at once demanded her, and led her to one side of the hall apart from the others.

"Miss Marian," he said in a low voice, "I want to ask your advice in an important matter. I am in love. Would you tell the lady so if you were me?"

Marian felt a little sinking at her heart and a sudden feeling of pique.

"Is there any particular reason why you shouldn't tell her?" she asked wonderingly.

"Only that I have known her but a short time and I'm half afraid to do so. You see she is a Northerner, and not used to our impetuous ways."

"Oh," said Marian laughing with embarrassment as a light dawned on her mind. "I advise you by all means to wait till you have impressed her with your sincerity."

"Surely," she said to herself as she was carried off by little Doc, "Gus was quite right when he called the cowboy tropical."

"What have you been deviling poor Jay about?" inquired Doc. "He looks raw-hidey enough to kill somebody."

"Mr. Doc," began Marian, not heeding his question, and the boy chuckled at the unusual title, "I want to ask you a question. Bill said, —or rather, my cousin Bess said, that her husband threatens to kill her. Why does he want to kill her? Was the wrong all on his side?"

"Yes, principally. I think he really did love her devotedly, and she was so silly and flirty that he got jealous. He needn't have been, for she was all right,—only rather too fond of flattery and attention. She was only a kid when she married, and a heap too good for him. We cowboys are apt to think a girl is as bad as she appears, anyway, but we soon found out Bess was only silly. She's honest and affectionate, but she just plumb couldn't live with a man who stole and gambled and murdered. Bill and she know things about him. Bill adores Joe, so he ain't afraid of him, but if Bess marries again she's a deader, sure, and she knows it,—when she stops to think which ain't often. I reckon she's trying to forget it to-night," and he looked at the radiant creature who was approaching on Harry's arm.

"Say, Madge!" began Bess with a giggle. "Harry here allowed you was dancin' alone, but then we saw a black line round your waist, and when you whirled round there was a red thing on your shoulder. I thought it might be a black belt and a peony, but Harry decided it was Doc's arm and his red head."

Doc drew himself up in wrath. "Women always look taller than men, but Miss Marian and

I air pretty much of a bigness," and he squared his shoulders, trying to look as tall as possible.

"Time to buy you-all's supper tickets," interrupted the strident voice of the leader. "Come on boys! don't be mean!" Then followed a stampede accompanied by an uproarous war-whoop, a sort of imitation foot-ball scrimmage, from which Marian found herself extricated by Jay, who had unceremoniously seized her arm before his more bashful cousin had gained the courage to request the honor of her company at supper.

"You will eat with me?" said Jay simply.

"With pleasure!" she answered gayly.

Jay's buoyant good nature was always refreshing, and his reckless manner fascinating in the extreme. The high esteem in which she held one cousin, and the fascination exerted by the other, were then as they had ever been, at war with each other.

"You look like an angel, to-night, honey," Bess said caressingly, putting back a stray tendril of hair on Marian's forehead. "Jay says you're the sweetest white woman he ever saw."

"What does he mean by that?" replied Marian with indignation.

"Oh, that's just one of our southern expres-

sions. It's meant for a compliment, so don't get mad, girlie."

In another moment Marian found herself dancing with Jay, who whispered, "A word to the wise is sufficient, Miss Marian, so don't be afraid of me."

"You're a good boy," she answered gratefully as she looked up into his sunburnt face and met his roguish black eyes.

"He is so handsome," she thought, "one could hardly help loving him if she could feel sure of him."

"What is that noise?" asked Jay stopping suddenly and holding the girl in a tight grip.

Marian stood trembling, gazing in the direction of the street from whence came a subdued roar. Osterhandt dashed from the room. The roar increased, but was still an indescribable, unaccountable sound. The musicians stopped and several other men went out.

"Go on with the music," called Tom loudly, but the musicians did not obey. Jay placed Marian in a seat near her cousin and hurriedly followed the other men out of the room. The hall was soon left deserted by all the men, and the girls huddled together with white faces.

"What does it mean?" asked Marian; then an inkling of the truth flashed into her mind.

"I am going down to see what the trouble is," she said, freeing herself from the trembling Bess; and before anyone could stop her she ran from the room, not even waiting for a wrap.

As she hurried downstairs she heard the click of the lock in the door behind her.

In the light of the bright southern moon she saw a surging mass of men moving toward the bridge, on the other side of which was the prison. Here and there in the crowd was a frightened looking woman rushing along with the others. They were quieter than she expected, but there was intense excitement in the air. Some of the men appeared to have come from a great distance, and all of them were more like hungry wolves than human beings. They reminded her of a picture of a French mob in the Reign of Terror.

"Can this be the twentieth century?" she thought.

She stepped out on the street and moved along on the outside of the crowd.

"Are you alone?" asked a woman peering at her curiously. "You had better come along with John and me," indicating a rather stupid looking countryman with her. "It's got all over the country," she went on, "that they had that rapscallion of a preacher here in Athens jail, an' they

were so afraid he'd get away before he could be tried that everyone has turned out to tend to it. They had cheap rates on the trains to-day."

"What are they going to do?" asked Marian with white lips.

"You watch, and you'll see, honey," answered the woman with an air of mystery.

Every man seemed to be carrying a bag of some sort. Seeing her glance at his large, old-fashioned carpet-bag, the countryman opened it a little, and let her get a glimpse of a pair of large pistols. "Big fine for carrying weapons in the city," he chuckled and shut the bag.

The excitement grew more intense; Marian felt herself to be surrounded by a sea of blood-shot eyes gleaming from under a mass of shiny black hair. Just then a murmur ran through the crowd, and Marian saw six men dragging their helpless victim toward a hastily erected gallows near the bridge. Marian sprang forward, not knowing what she would do, but impelled to save an act of violence. The crowd, surprised, parted to let her through. In an instant she was in front of them, standing there all in white, like an avenging angel, and at the same moment a tall, handsome man was by her side. Holding up his hand he called, "I forbid this action in the name of the law!"

The men were so taken by surprise that they paused for a moment, and in that moment, Sin Killer Jones with almost superhuman strength tore himself from his captors, and sprang upon the bridge.

"Shoot!" yelled a dozen voices, and as many shots rang out on the clear air. A sudden splash followed.

While this little scene was enacted Marian heard Hyslop say in a hoarse voice, "For God's sake, get Mayberry and the girl out of here, before they turn on them."

At once she was wrapped in a dark coat and a big hat pressed over her head, and Jay was pushing her way through the mob, who were yelling and swearing in frenzy. She felt herself jerked along, buffeted on all sides by the surging throng. She felt her courage give way. "Where is Tom?" she asked.

"Close behind. Don't speak," whispered Jay.

In another moment she was in a close carriage, with Tom beside her and Jay driving.

"If that skunk hasn't drowned I'll never forgive either of them," muttered Hyslop as he turned back toward the city.

Presently Marian knew that they had left the pavements and were driving along the soft prairie.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

The carriage stopped and the two horsemen behind it rode up.

"You may go back now, Harry," said Jay's voice; "explain things to Bess and see that she gets home all right. Watch things and report to us when you bring Bess back. Go on, boys," and the carriage started again.

"Where are we going?" repeated Marian.

Tom roused himself from the daze into which he had fallen.

"We are driving you-all to Quincy to take the train from there. We didn't dare put you on the train at Athens for fear someone would recognize you."

"Would they have hurt me?" she asked, her voice trembling.

"Hurt you!" echoed Jay with a short laugh. "I supposed you two were trying to commit suicide. I never heard of such a crazy performance. Why didn't you let them alone?" he added with sudden heat. "If ever a man deserved lynching he did. It's a wonder Tom wasn't torn limb from limb. Women have no business to meddle in such matters."

Marian, feeling very faint, huddled back into the corner of the carriage with a little sob. Tom

leaned over, and, taking her hand gently, gave it a reassuring pressure.

"Do you forgive me?" she whispered.

His only answer was another pressure of the hand.

"What will your mother say?" she asked in hesitating words.

He laughed. "It is just what she would have done. She would sacrifice herself and her whole family for a principle."

Marian was a little comforted and the fresh air blowing in her face revived her.

"Are we going to Xantus?" she asked timidly.

"Yes and to the D. L. ranch as soon as possible," answered Tom, for Jay still kept a moody silence.

The thought of that peaceful life, and her good old uncle and aunt quite overcame her, and she began crying again, but more quietly.

"They sent us away to escape all this," she thought remorsefully.

"Cheer up, Miss Marian" said Tom tenderly. "You did what you thought was right, and had more courage than anyone I ever saw. I am not sorry a bit; I would do the same thing if I had it all to live over again."

Marian leaned exhausted against the cushions, but her hand still remained in Tom's. The

Algerita blossoms in her dress had not lost their odor. She shut her eyes to fully enjoy the sense of peace and security that she had felt in the storm on the Mayberry Ranch.

“How strong he is!” she thought. “The love of a man like this is well worth having.”

Meanwhile the carriage rolled swiftly along, Jay holding the reins in moody silence.

CHAPTER XXI.

SEVERAL weeks had elapsed since the lynching bee. The anger of the populace was appeased by the supposed death of Sin Killer Jones. They were sure if he hadn't been shot, he had certainly drowned, and only regretted the lack of ceremony of the occasion. Tom was freely forgiven, as it was assumed he had acted at Marian's command, and she was slightly canonized as being of wonderful daring, though a trifle crazy. Bess had returned home and the two girls had quite recovered from the event. It was presumed by all that Joe Carruth and his gang had been sufficiently warned not to appear in that part of the country again, so the inhabitants of the various ranches settled down comfortably to their work. The winter months on a Texan ranch are, to those to whom it is no novelty, unspeakably long, dull and lonely, but they were not so to the visitor from New York. Marian was delighted at being initiated into the more technical part of the cow-punching business. Every day some new

thing appeared to claim her attention. Of course neither Tom nor Jay allowed her to forget them. Jay's ranch being nearer than Tom's she saw the former more frequently. Few days elapsed without the sound of his horse's feet, which she had learned to distinguish; for horses are quite as individual and have as many peculiar traits as human beings. Often, also, came the sound of another horse's feet and a manly voice singing, "I'd cross deep waters for you, my dear;" and somehow, that voice brought the color to her cheek as she remembered "the lynching bee."

She had wondered, when she planned to spend the winter at her uncle's ranch, how she could get along without theatre parties, dinners, and dances, and all the varied entertainment which life in a large city affords; but time never weighed less heavily. She was out every afternoon, picking up pecans under the loaded trees, finding the late flowers, or dreamily looking at the strange scenery.

"What are you-all doing alone here?" queried Doc one day as he rode up. "We're rounding up a bunch of cattle. Don't you-all want to help?"

"Why do you people always say 'you-all'?" she asked irrelevantly.

"Why! What do you-all say when you mean you-all?" he asked in surprise.

"Why, just 'you'."

"But does that cover the ground?"

"It seems to."

"Well, they say 'you-uns' and 'we-uns' in Arkansas. They have a song like this:

'It's hard for you-uns and we-uns to part
For you-uns have taken we-unses heart.'

Marian laughed heartily. "I won't come just yet," she said, "I'm going to the spring after a drink of water," and Doc galloped off.

So the days passed. In the evening Bess usually entertained her beaux, the chief favorite still being Harry from Jay's ranch. Sometimes there were several ranchmen from a distance who came to stay a day or two. They were all "nice boys" Marian thought; not as polished as her New York friends, nor as skilled in booklore, but chivalrous, kind-hearted, and generous. It was interesting to meet all the new people, and hear their stories of former days and of open ranges and drives. At night she often sat at the piano and played till the boys got sleepy and one by one stole off to bed. At last there would be no one left but Hugh, stretched out to sleep in the corner. When she woke him up he always looked very much ashamed, and begged for a kiss at parting, accepting her refusal with perfect good

humor. One bright moonlight evening as Marian sat at the piano improvising variations on her favorite song,—“I’d cross deep waters for you, my dear”—the sleepy Hugh was roused by horse’s hoofs which, coming with a “clump” in the soft grass, stopped short at the door, and Jay entered breezily. Hugh greeted him with a suspicious look, for he fancied he had been drinking, but as Marian seemed pleased to see him, and Jay appeared all right, Hugh retired from the field.

“Miss Marian,” Jay began as soon as they were alone, “I’ve made up my mind to tell that girl I love her, and see what she’ll say to me.”

“Do you love her so lightly,” she parried, “that you are willing to run the risk of losing her entirely?”

“I’m afraid another fellow’s beating my time,” he argued. “It’s no use talking, Miss Marian, you know perfectly well I love you.”

“Mr. Carruth,” answered the girl, drawing herself up haughtily, “you should see for yourself it is of no use to say that to me!”

“But what’s the matter with me?” gasped Jay. “Is it because you like Tom better? If I thought *that!*” and he glared as he took hold of his six shooter threateningly.

“Don’t be foolish, Mr. Jay,” said Marian an-

grily. "If I must speak plainly, I like Texas for a visit, but I much prefer my own home. I wouldn't marry the Angel Gabriel, and live outside of New York."

Jay grinned. "Old Gabe wouldn't cut much ice as a matrimonial candidate according to the girls, but if there's no man ahead of me I'll keep in the running. You told me I might go to New York," he added.

"I don't want to feel afraid of you," urged Marian, disregarding his last remark. "I like you, and I want to be friends with you. Can't you forget this sentimental nonsense?"

"If no man's ahead of me I'll wait," reiterated Jay doggedly; "but we'll be good friends till you change your mind. Good-night now, Miss Marian," and with a look on his face which was far from sweet, Jay strode off into the darkness.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE roses and the jasmine were still blooming out of doors, and there had been only two Northerners when Christmas day arrived. Piper, the cowboy with the broken leg, had returned from San Antonio and with the others had laid in a stock of old Old Kentucky whiskey in honor of the occasion. Even those who never indulged in libations at any other time allowed themselves this privilege on Christmas day. That, with a pyrotechnical display, and a noise more suitable to the Fourth of July, seemed to be the approved manner of celebrating the day on the D. L. Ranch.

"Christmas gift!" screamed everyone on entering the room, or those in the room screamed it first, as people are wont to do in a game called "menagerie." The event of the day was the arrival of a Christmas box from Marian's father, containing several pounds of Huyler's candy—an unheard of luxury in Texas—also a small present for each of the boys and a larger one for members of the family. Marian received a handy

volume edition of Shakespeare, which she decided at once to hand over to Mrs. Mayberry, knowing that her father would not care. Aunt Phoebe was overjoyed at becoming the possessor of a black silk dress, and Uncle Dan had a meerschauum pipe which pleased him so much that he declared it should be buried with him. A gold watch for Bess rendered that volatile young woman happy, and her attentions to Marian for the rest of the day were overpowering.

A few days after Christmas Marian was sitting in her room writing to her father and enjoying the warmth of her small stove, as the coldest Norther of the season was blowing outside.

"I am getting to be quite an expert rider," she wrote, "though I shall never equal Bess. At first I had many falls from my horse, but as I fell on the soft grass it didn't hurt me at all. You should have seen me the first time I tried to jump a fence. Barebones and I landed squarely in the middle of it, greatly to the discomfiture of us both. Luckily it was not a barbed wire. At one time I would have been thrown into a ditch but for the oportune help of Mr. Carruth, who happened to be near and who with wonderful dexterity and agility, snatched me from the horse as he went down. My feet had been shaken from the

stirrup by the jar, and just as I was about to plunge over the animal's head——”

Marian's epistle was interrupted at this point by a knock at the door, and to her cordial “come in” in walked Jack Packer.

“May I shave in here?” he asked. “It's colder than Greenland in my room, and besides I feel kinder nervous with Boss and Old Miss gone. They're over to call on Mrs. Mayberry, and the house is as silent as the tomb. Where's Bess?”

“Taking a nap,” answered Marian.

“What's the matter with your room?” he asked as he looked about him curiously. “Looks like you was moving.”

Marian laughed. “Bess has been examining my wardrobe,” she said. “She is not a very orderly person and I have been too busy to put them away.”

“Your things are plumb lovely, sure enough, but I wouldn't know what half of them were for. Oh, Lord!” he groaned as he fell over the small stove.

Then, calmly adjusting the hot funnel, he remarked that he guessed it was as good as ever, and proceeded to shave before Marian's dressing-table talking at intervals.

“I'm elected sheriff sure enough this time, Miss Marian,” he said calmly. “Old Bixby was

killed two days ago. Bob has just come from Xantus in a carriage to drive me back. Tell Boss he can send the money he owes me right to Xantus, whenever he gets good and ready. I'm not in the slightest hurry for it."

"Please let me give it to you now," urged Marian, "Uncle Dan will give it right back to me."

"Of course I won't," he said looking at her indignantly, with the razor half raised, and one side of his face covered with lather.

"But I'm not *giving* it to you. It will simply be more convenient for Uncle Dan to hand it to me than to send it to Xantus."

"Don't matter how you put it, I won't touch it. Don't say another word. I'm plumb sorry I mentioned it."

"Oh, well, if you feel that way, I'll take back my suggestion," laughed the girl.

"You're awful kind, Miss Marian,—everybody says that, and I know you meant all right," he replied magnanimously and the subject was dropped.

"Once I had a terrible toothache," he continued. "Boss said the nerve was dying. I couldn't get at a doctor so after I'd been awake for a night or two I just heated a wire and ran it down the hole."

Marian gave him a look of horror.

"I jumped lively for a few moments but it did the business and I slept good the next night."

"Speaking of not sleeping," he said collecting his shaving materials, "they say if you put a leaf of the Bible under your pillow it will cure insomnia."

Marian looked incredulous.

"Honest! I can tell you who told me. It was Hyslop." This last in a tone which carried conviction.

"Does it make any difference what leaf?" she asked quizzically.

"I don't know, but I reckon not."

"Perhaps the fly-leaf would do."

"Now, Miss Marian, you are just laughing at me. Thank you for letting me shave here. You certainly are the sweetest girl I ever knew, and I'll remember you to my dying day," and he kissed her hand as he departed.

"Poor Jack! His dying day may not be far off, now he is sheriff," she thought looking after him as he rode away.

That night, when her uncle and aunt returned she related the incident to them. Uncle Dan was very grave.

"Jack is a fine lad," he said. "I should hate to have anything happen to him."

"Marian," broke in Aunt Phoebe, "it's goin' to be awful cold to-night. I want you to go down to Jack's room and get a quilt that's in his closet. Jack's gone and Sid is down to the pen, so you can walk right in."

Marian accordingly made her way to the room at the end of the long ell which she entered without knocking. Groping along to the closet at the end of the room she suddenly felt the touch of cold steel against her face, and a voice said, "Who are you?"

"Marian!" she gasped. "Aunt Phoebe sent me for a quilt. She thought you were down to the pen. How you frightened me!"

"Well, you frightened *me*," said the boy, "coming rustling in in the dark. I'll get your quilt," and in a moment he thrust it into her hand.

"Who is it?" asked Marian as the boy, overcome with sudden modesty, had dived down and even stuck his head under the bed clothes.

"It's Piper," he said. "Walter didn't get back to-day as we'd expected, and I got nervous and came in to sleep with Sid."

"Walter not back!"

"No and I'm dreadfully worried. He's Tom's brother, you know, and perhaps they've hurt him."

"I'll speak to Uncle about it," the girl assured him in a tone of deep concern, as she hurried from the room.

Uncle Dan took the news calmly. "The boys often stay longer'n we expect when they don't get their work done up in time," he answered.

"If he don't come back to-morrow I'm going after him myself," Marian asserted stoutly.

The old man took his pipe out of his mouth and stared.

"What! ride twenty miles alone!"

"I will."

"No, I promise you if he isn't back by noon to-morrow I'll send two of the boys after him."

CHAPTER XXIII.

IMMEDIATELY after breakfast the two boys, glad to get a holiday, started out provided with blankets, in case they had to stay over night, with slickers in case of rain, and plenty of provisions, which might be of great service to Walter. At the thought of what might be, they both grew very sober. If he were all right he would certainly be out of provisions. Soon youth and natural exuberance of feeling banished their momentary apprehension however, and they went on their way rejoicing. Over hill and dale they went, slowly at first, then, impelled by an unexpressed foreboding which increased as the silence and loneliness of the place became more impressive, they urged their horses on to a continual gallop, scarcely slackening at the river fords nor down the rocky banks until they reached the third pasture.

The cows, scattered here and there, were languidly grazing or contentedly chewing their cud; some were gathered round the base of the big windmill, which at that moment was whirling

at a brisk rate, but nowhere was there a sign that Walter had ever been there.

Choosing each a horse from the number of semi-wild ones that galloped round the field in company with the more moderately moving cows, they succeeded in roping and saddling them, observing at the same time that the horse Walter rode was not with them. They mounted at once and, riding in opposite directions, searched thoroughly and steadily, investigating every cedar break for a trace of the dead or injured body of Walter Mayberry. Then, when darkness put an effectual end to that day's search, they met again by the big windmill, agreeing to start out at the first ray of daylight to the river, which ran wide and clear through the third pasture.

Not a breath of air was stirring that early morning. The awful stillness of the day increased their tension of feeling, accustomed though they were to being alone. They spoke in whispers as they rode along, stopping simultaneously at intervals to sniff the air, as if to detect the presence of gun powder. Then they would listen attentively to catch the sound of anything but the beating of their own hearts, or the impatient stamp of their horses' feet.

"I haven't seen no buzzards, Sid," whispered Piper.

They moved on more quickly than before until, reaching the steep rocky incline which led to the river, they dashed down with imminent risk of breaking their precious necks by some turning stone. They galloped as if Jesse James and all his crew were close upon their heels. Up and down the river's edge they searched in vain, stopping now and then to give the loud cowboy call and to listen for even a faint response. They gazed into the clear depths of the river, down to the sandy bottom which could be clearly seen, but finally returned to their starting point on the river's bank to sink down discouraged and exhausted.

"Won't you take a bite of something to eat?" said Piper, looking at Sid.

"Not a mouthful could I get down," replied Sid, taking a pull at the canteen by his side. "I was awful fond of the little cuss."

Suddenly jumping up he pointed across the stream with great excitement.

"What's that big placard on that tree over yonder?"

"Where?"

"That big tree across the river, beside the Algerita bush! Don't you see it?"

The two boys stood for a second as if they saw a real ghost, then Sid, springing on his horse,

dashed into the water and swam to the opposite bank. Back again he came, holding the placard in his hand. On it was written in huge letters:

"Tell Tom Mayberry the day that Joe Carruth is taken Walter Mayberry dies."

That was all, but it was enough and too much time had been wasted already. Up the hill the boys dashed again, their spirits rising in spite of the trouble before them, and too excited to feel any fatigue. After remounting their now rested horses they made straight for the Mayberry ranch. Stopping only to leave the placard and tell their story they pushed on to the Luce ranch with the sad intelligence, and added the information that Tom Mayberry, with one of the boys, had started out at once and would pick up as many more as they could on the way; that Tom would never come back till he found Walter; that if Boss could only spare Gus they would like him to take charge of the Mayberry ranch; that Mrs. Mayberry was almost insane with grief and fear, and begged that Marian would go to stay with her until her boys returned.

Uncle Dan felt that he must spare Gus even if he himself would have to work harder and take more responsibility, and said that of course Marian would go to Mrs. Mayberry.

CHAPTER XXIV.

POOR TOM, not knowing where to go, rode on for days with his faithful companions, eating only to keep up his strength, and pausing for rest only when darkness prevented his search. He stopped at all the nearby ranches, wherever he could find one or two men who were willing to risk their lives in helping him.

"We've got to go down into Mexico, that's where he'll be," advised one of the men, "and too many of us mustn't be seen together."

So, arranging a signal in case of immediate need, and a meeting place at night, they separated into groups of two; Tom singing at intervals,

"I've crossed deep waters for you, my dear.
What more could a poor man do?"

He half hoped that, hearing the old familiar song in his brother's voice, Walter might come crawling from some cedar brake, or suddenly arise from the ground.

Night after night he returned to the camp, tired but determined.

"I'll never give up till I find him," he would say, and "we'll all stand by yer, Boss," would be the answer in a chorus of voices. "If we do find him, we'll feel our lives ain't so worthless as they have been," and their rough sympathy cheered his heart and gave him renewed courage.

It was nearly a month after Tom and his friends had crossed the borders into Mexico, when one night Tom and his companion came upon an apparently deserted camp-fire, one of many which he had passed. They halted a moment and, gazing round the scene and across the dark field beyond, Tom sadly and almost unconsciously sang the old song, "I'd cross deep waters for you, my dear," when at the sound a slender form stole out of a cedar brake before them holding up one hand, and placing the fingers of the other hand upon his lips in token of silence.

"Walter!" gasped Tom nearly falling from his horse, and springing down he clasped the slight figure in his arms.

"Come at once. Don't stop to talk," he whispered hoarsely.

"I can't, Tom. I've given my word of honor never to leave Joe Carruth till he is caught or dead. Then I am at liberty to seek my own safety."

"Why did you ever promise such a thing?"

"It was either that or instant death, and if you take me away they'll find me again and kill me."

Without replying Tom seized Walter and with the help of John bound him on his own horse; then John quickly led him away to the cross-roads, the place of meeting of Tom's friends.

Then Tom waited alone till two men who had heard his signal met him. He gave them a hurried account of the preceding scene.

"I'm going to get Joe Carruth now, dead or alive," he said, his eyes flashing.

"All right, Boss, it's just as you say," they answered, and the two men alighted at once, throwing the reins over their horses' heads and leaving them to graze at a safe but convenient distance.

The three men stood quietly waiting together, when, almost without the sound of a footstep, Joe Carruth stood facing Tom. In the semi-darkness he had probably mistaken him for his brother, but Tom did not stop to consider that question. Quick as lightning he seized him about the waist, and a fierce struggle ensued amid flash after flash of revolvers which lighted up the twilight and showed a similar struggle going on between the friends of each party.

Men were falling and groaning around him, and none were able to help Tom cope with the powerful outlaw, who now by a dexterous thrust of the arm about Tom's waist, seized his revolver. Tom bore down upon the wrist and held it firm. For a second the two men, friends from childhood, gazed into each other's eyes, Tom seeing those of a wild, hunted animal, and Joe encountering a calm determination which death itself could not daunt. Suddenly Tom's endurance, born of regular habits and honest labor, gained the advantage, and after one final struggle Joe was on the ground, with Tom's whole weight on his chest. Before the exhausted Joe could renew his efforts, Tom struck him a quick blow with the butt of his revolver, and, seeing him stretched apparently lifeless before him, turned away his head with a feeling of sickness.

"You ain't used to striking a man when he's down, and it hurts, don't it, Tom?" said a voice behind him, and springing quickly to his feet he looked into the eyes of Hyslop.

"You here! What a man you are!" he exclaimed.

"You see the secret service never let up till they bag their man," he answered. "I've been hunting him ever since and Osterhandt and the others are waiting for me at the other end. The

kid thinks he'll get a lot of glory but I'm afraid you've stolen our thunder."

As they looked about among the prostrate forms, some of whom were unknown to them, they recognized Picarda, evidently dead, Jakes, badly wounded, and one of Tom's men dead. While the latter stopped to feel his friend's heart he looked about him anxiously.

"Where's Doc?" he said.

"Here I am, Boss," said a feeble voice nearby, and a form came to a sitting posture; "I was clean knocked silly, but no wounds worth mentioning."

"Here's something worthy of interest, Tom," called out Hyslop, and Tom walked over to behold the prostrate form of Sin Killer Jones who glared up at him in impotent rage.

"And we nearly lost our lives for this rascal!" he thought, his memory bringing before him that night in Athens and the brave girl, the thought of whom for a moment shut out the scene before him.

"Look out, Boss," yelled Doc, and before Tom could jump to one side the prostrate man aimed his six shooter directly at him and pulled the trigger. It was empty and he dropped it with an oath.

"He's the worst snake on God's earth!" said

the disgusted Hyslop. "I can hardly keep my hands off of him."

"Joe's men may be back any minute," called Doc, rising unsteadily to his feet; "hadn't we better get out of this?"

Just at that moment they heard the sound of horses' feet and four men appeared.

"It's our men," shouted the delighted Hyslop, and Tom saw the familiar faces of two of the supposed cattlemen, also Osterhandt and Jack Packer, the new sheriff.

"I have a warrant for the arrest of Joseph Carruth and Winthrop Jones," said the sheriff jumping from his horse.

"All right, they're both here," cried the joyful detective. "Come, Tom, we'll put Joe on his horse, and I s'pose we'll have to take along that cuss," glaring at Sin Killer Jones.

Commanding Joe's horse to kneel, they lifted Joe, now securely bound, and fastened him across the saddle. The outlaw had recovered consciousness, but did not speak. As the horse regained his feet with some difficulty, Joe looked about with keen interest.

"Say, old man," said Osterhandt leaning over Sin Killer Jones, "don't you want to come up and be saved? I suppose you feel you're all right, 'cause you've never danced a step in your

life.—His leg is broken,” he added, but no one seemed to feel troubled at the intelligence, and the “Sin Killer” was tied on the back of one of the waiting horses.

While the men were hastily digging three graves by the light of the flickering camp-fire, the detective went his rounds, collecting the few fire-arms, and delving here and there into the ground where there seemed evidences of hidden treasure; at the same time glancing frequently at the faces of the prisoners—shaggy, unkempt men, who looked larger and fiercer by the fitful light which drew out their shadows to enormous lengths and alternately effaced or illumined their faces with a brilliant red light. The ceremony of burial over, the cavalcade proceeded slowly towards the cross roads.

“It’s all right, May, my boy,” said Joe Caruth, looking sadly but affectionately at Walter as he saw him bound on the horse at the cross roads. “You kept your word like a man, and I’ll keep mine. Whatever becomes of me in the future you are as free as air so far as I am concerned.

The tears came into Walter’s eyes. “I’m so sorry for you, Joe,” he said.

“It’s all right,” repeated the outlaw. “The game’s up just now, but I’m sure to escape. It

seemed like old times when you were with me, kid."

Then turning to Tom he went on, "I don't bear you any grudge, Tom, you couldn't have done any different. I see how it is now I've talked with Walt. I heard you were hanging about the Luce ranch all the time."

Tom flushed hotly, as Marian's face rose before him. His heart ached with sympathy for his cousin and childhood companion, as they rode slowly homeward. Walter, now unbound, rode on one side and Tom on the other of the bold outlaw, and both longed intensely to see the faces of their dear ones again.

Just before they reached the cross roads, Joe struggled to free himself. "I'm not trying to escape, boys," he said, "but I can smell the old familiar fragrance of the honeysuckle and the Almond blossoms. Let me sit straight. I give you my word I'll not try to escape."

"That's quite enough from Joe, boys," said Tom, and his hands and feet were unbound.

"Well-by, old chap," he said, as Tom and Walter took the road towards home. "Don't you worry yourself about me. A man ain't dead till he's laid out, and don't you forget it."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BRIEF winter season had almost worn away and there were signs of spring in the air, once more sweet with the scent of the Algerita, when early one morning a voice was heard under Marian's window singing,

"I'd cross deep waters for you, my dear."

Mrs. Mayberry sprang out of bed at the sound, rushed to the door and was almost lost in the embraces of her two sons, while Marian dressed hastily, her hands trembling so that she could hardly accomplish the task.

"Poor Joe is on his way to the prison at Xantus," said Walter sadly, when the first joy of greeting was over. "I dread to meet Jay,—it will almost kill him."

"Oh, no!" his mother answered comfortably. "Jay felt that he would be taken, but he is sure he will escape before he is brought to trial.

"He's been here a good deal," she added turn-

ing to Tom, "both to get news from you and to see Marian. He will be truly pleased to hear that Walter is all right."

"To see Marian?" he repeated anxiously, ignoring the last part of her remark.

"Yes,—but you needn't feel alarmed, I am sure she doesn't love him," and she patted his hand affectionately.

"Nor me, I fear," he added with dejection.

"I don't see how she can help loving you," the mother answered looking at him with pride, "but Northern girls are different from ours and I don't understand; but come and eat your breakfast. I expect you're both half starved."

"Bill Wilder is here," she added as she led the way into the dining-room. "He is going back to the Luce ranch this morning, and I think Gus and Marian will go in the carriage with him. He brought instructions for them to return just as soon as you appeared. Bill's in an awful state, between anxiety and semi-drunkenness, but Walter and Marian can drive, and Gus can take care of Bill."

Tom looked grave. "How can Daniel Luce take back into his employ a man like Bill?" he said.

Meanwhile Marian and all the boys—whose scanty toilets needed little time or attention—

had appeared on the scene, and there was no chance for pursuing the subject.

Tom gave Marian a quick hand-clasp and a look which spoke volumes. She pressed his hand with a cordial frankness. Then, turning, she kissed Walter on the forehead, to that young man's confusion and the delighted acclamation of the boys.

"I reckon we-all will go and get lost immediately," drawled one of them. "You're sure putting a premium on kidnapping, Miss Marian."

The story was told over and over again, amid various interjections of joy and amazement.

"The wicked shall dig a pit, and fall into it himself," said Mrs. Mayberry.

"Yes!" said Gus. "If Joe'd had the sense to clear out and let us all alone, Tom wouldn't have interfered with him; but he just fixed things so he plumb *had* to."

"How did Bill escape?" asked Tom in an undertone.

"Oh, there was no evidence against him. He's too cute for that."

"I hate to let you go out of my sight, Walter dear, so soon after welcoming you back almost from the grave," said his mother tenderly, "but no one else can go with Marian." Then to the girl she said, "My child, I cannot thank you for

all you have done for me. You have been an inexpressible comfort."

"I couldn't have been happy anywhere but with you," returned Marian, blushing a vivid red as she got into the carriage which had just driven up.

She looked somewhat askance at the morose figure on the back seat, and before taking her place beside the gentle Walter she whispered to Gus, "I'm really afraid of him, he seems so wild."

"You needn't worry, I can manage him," was his comforting assurance.

So they drove off, Marian was ever hand to the kind friends who stood on the porch watching their departure.

All went well for a time. Marian and Walter chatted together, or tactfully avoided with the quarrelsome Bill till he became almost unbearable. Finally, the long-suffering Walter was goaded by the sneers directed at him by Bill and observed that Bill seemed altogether too much interested in the capture of Joe Carruth.

"What do you mean by that, you damned little ninny?" screamed Bill, and, quite unmindful of Marian's presence, he pulled out his long knife and, holding it at Walter's throat, demanded that he take back what he had said.

Walter turned pale but neither moved nor spoke, nor did he relax his hold on the reins.

Before Marian could say a word Gus pointed his revolver at Bill, roaring, "Put up that knife, you low-lived cur! Are you too drunk to see a lady is present?"

Bill dropped back with a maudlin apology, but Gus still kept him under cover, and Marian's mind was in no calm state.

"Don't you be afraid, Miss Marian," said Walter in an undertone. "I never saw him as bad as this before, but Gus can manage him."

The mind of a drunken man, like that of a child, is easily diverted, so Bill's bluster soon died down, and he contented himself with bursts of song not altogether nice; but, no one paying any attention to them, he was permitted to warble to his heart's content.

They finally reached the Luce ranch in safety; Walter becoming at once the center of interest, so that the whole story had to be gone over again. Bess turned pale and put her hand to her heart when she heard of Joe's capture.

"Don't you be frightened, my girl," said Uncle Dan, patting her arm affectionately, "we'll see that he doesn't get away now we've got him."

"I'll never feel safe while he's above ground," she answered with a dark look in her eyes.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"DON'T IT beat all," began Bill one night, in a quarrelsome mood, "how Miss Bess dresses up every evening now-a-days? Comes down to dinner every night in a décolleté chiffonier, or whatever you call dress suits for girls."

"I might have put on my dress-suit if I had realized the importance of it," laughed Gus, "but we so seldom dress for dinner in Texas that I have become somewhat careless in that respect."

"You-all think you're powerful smart, don't you?" said Bess scornfully. "I guess I can put on a decent dress once in a while without having so much fuss made over it."

"Some folks have to dress up to make an impression," growled Bill. "Miss Marian's hands are pretty enough not to need no rings to set 'em off."

"That's the first time Bill was ever known to compliment anybody," said Tad in an undertone.

"One always dresses up when they're engaged, don't they, Marian?" and Bess turned to her cousin for support.

"Of course,—that is—I suppose so," stammered Marian.

"Why do you act so embarrassed?" laughed Gus. "By the way, when is yours to be announced?"

"Never! I couldn't live outside of New York, and that is perfectly understood by everyone," she answered with decision.

"Was I referring to anyone in particular?" he queried mischievously.

"I am very happy at home with Papa," said Marian, "and I shall never love any man as I do him."

"Are you quite sure you are honest with yourself, niece?" said Uncle Dan affectionately.

"Well, anyway, Uncle Dan, people can't be happy together whose whole lives have been so different," she said, earnestly.

" 'I tell you love has naught to do
With meetness or unmeetness.' "

quoted Gus, while the sentimental cowboys were very quiet.

Bess, quite unconscious of the service she was rendering her cousin, held out her hand in which she had gathered all her diamond pins and rings. "I've just two thousand dollars worth here," she said. "Who'll buy?"

"You mean just the jewelry?" sneered Bill. "I reckon that's all that's worth much."

"Bill!" roared Uncle Dan so fiercely that every one jumped. "You'll go a little bit too far with that ugly tongue of yours some day, and then you'll have to reckon with me. I've taken no notice of your ugliness, 'cause it's born in yer, but you've got to let Bess alone arter this," and the recalcitrant William was cowed for the first time.

"Beware the anger of a patient man," murmured Gus.

"The trouble with Bess," whispered Hugh, "is that she's just getting used to walkin' on carpets." Then aloud he said, "Gus, ain't this a good time to tell your wolf story?"

"Yes, do tell it," urged Marian.

"Oh, it isn't much," laughed Gus, "but if you tease me hard enough I'll tell it to you. It was when I was a kid at home. The older boys were all off camping on another part of the ranch, and only a couple of niggers, my sisters, Maw and myself were in the ranch house.

"Suddenly we heard the most awful hollering you most ever heard; I thought the heavens must be falling, sure. Then the niggers came in tumbling over each other and trembling with fear. I ran to the window and looking out saw a

large cayote falling about like he was drunk. His eyes were like balls of fire, and he was frothing yellow stuff at the mouth.

“ ‘Just get my gun and let me blaze at him,’ I yelled, and one of the niggers ran for it. I was so scared with the unearthly noise the beast was making that I trembled like a leaf. I got my gun up to my shoulder, but the wolf didn’t stand and let me shoot him, nor did he run away, as any sane wolf would have done; but he just wobbled from side to side, butting his head all the time against the side posts of the house. Poor devil! I was so sort of horror-struck, or fascinated, or whatever the feeling was, that I couldn’t shoot. I just knelt there with the gun on my shoulder, and watched him till he finally butted himself to death.”

“What made him mad?” asked Sid.

“Well, there’s things in the world that’ll make even a wolf mad,” said Gus dryly; then, assuming a more serious air, he added, “madness in animals is due to some physical derangement, and is often caused by the bite of some other animal.”

“Did you ever hear of a madstone?” inquired Fritz. “It comes from the stomach of a diseased deer, and is very rare. When it is rubbed on the bite of a mad animal it is a sure cure.”

"Especially if applied at the increase of the moon. Rather fond of fairy tales, aren't you, Fritz?" inquired Gus sarcastically, and Fritz retired into his shell, feeling much discomforted.

"Girls, we are going dewberrying some day next week," announced Aunt Phoebe.

"I don't want to doubt your honest word, mother," replied her dutiful offspring, "but we ain't goin' to tear ourselves to pieces in those old briers, and get eat up by moccasins and rattlesnakes for a little mess of dewberries."

"I'll go with you, Auntie," said Marian pleasantly, and her aunt's face brightened.

"We might go to-morrow," she suggested, and Marian assented.

"Jay will go along with you any time when your aunt can't go," laughed Gus, but Marian refused to hear his remark.

It was still early morning and bade fair to be a very hot day when Aunt Phoebe came into the dining-room where Marian was taking her breakfast, and declared she was all ready.

"Take this sunbonnet," she commanded when they were about to step into the little run-about.

"I declare for it,—your paw will never forgive me for letting you get so brown. You don't look like you was white. I never went out without a sunbonnet in my life."

"Why, Auntie! It is considered very stylish in New York to be well tanned," laughed Marian, and drawing on the old gloves her aunt handed her, they started off. Very glad she was before they had picked long, that she had on those old gloves, for the dewberry vines have long and sharp prickles, and delighted was her aunt at the rapidity with which Marian gathered the berries, declaring that northern girls had twice the "sprawl" of southern girls.

But the dewberry bushes were so low on the ground that Marian was in constant dread of putting her hand on a snake, while it was difficult to find the bushes growing so close to the long grass; before she realized it she had wandered far out of sight of her busy aunt whose whole attention was absorbed by her task.

"Now I've sure got you alone for a moment," cried a voice behind her, and as she looked hurriedly round, Jay, who had stolen noiselessly up in the soft grass, sprang down to her side. His face was flushed and his eyes bright, but whether with excitement or drink she could not tell.

"How you startled me!" she said with a nervous, half-frightened laugh.

"Am I then so hideous in your eyes?" he demanded.

"Not that, only I didn't know anyone was

near," she stammered, and an embarrassed silence followed.

"Miss Marian," began Jay with decision, "you've avoided me of late, and it's just no use. You've got to remember one thing. I love you, and you've got to love me. You are sure going to be my wife sometime."

"A girl can't be forced into loving," she answered hotly. "At least I can't, and you may as well give up that idea first as last."

A heated argument followed, in which he attempted to seize the girl in his arms and she warded him off with flashing eyes, when the report of a pistol was heard behind them, and turning quickly Marian beheld a large moccasin snake with his head shot off, giving a final wiggle with his tail. At the same moment Tom Mayberry sprang from his horse just in time to support the almost fainting girl.

"Damn you!" cried Jay fiercely. "You are always butting in where you're not wanted! We might as well fight this out now as at any other time," and in his blind rage he attempted to strike Tom, who, grasping him by the wrists, held him firmly.

"If we are to fight let it be like gentlemen," he said sternly.



“He attempted to seize the girl in his arms.”

"Very well, only let it be soon," replied Jay as Tom released him.

"Oh, don't, please don't, boys!" begged Marian. "It seems as if I had all I could bear this winter without causing you to quarrel. The man who will beg the other's pardon for my sake, I shall feel really cares the most for me."

"That settles the matter; here, Tom," and Jay held out his hand to his cousin who took it mechanically but with no look of pleasure on his face.

Jay threw back his head with a quick gesture, and, turning to where his horse was standing, rode off without once casting a glance behind him.

"Promise me you won't fight with him," begged Marian looking up into Tom's stern face.

"Your word is my law," he answered gently. "You know that I too love you," and in his eyes was infinite tenderness. "I feel that Jay is right when he said I have lost all my spirit. But then Jay gave his word, and he won't try to break it, so in any case you needn't worry." Then he took both her hands in his and pressed them convulsively as with inexpressible longing he said, "I can't honestly blame Jay, for I want to do just the same thing." Then, releasing her hands he

hid his face in his own hands, "Oh, I do love you so," he said as he stifled a sob.

Marian did not speak; she was too deeply under the spell of this man's strong nature.

"If it could only be!" she thought passionately. "I am almost afraid that I love him! I must not, indeed I must not. My living here is out of the question."

Marian felt vaguely, too, that so great a love asked a great return, and then, too, Tom had such archaic notions of women obeying their husbands. No, a marriage between two such people could not lead to happiness.

"I am sorry you have said this," she murmured with a tremble in her voice, "for I never met a man before whom I admired as I do you." And turning away she sobbed convulsively—she scarcely knew why.

"Miss Marian," he said impressively, "a man can't love a girl without studying her, and I believe I know you better than you know yourself. I tell you that you care more for me than you realize. You may not marry me, but you will never forget me."

"I know that you are right," answered the girl brokenly, "and I am not sure that I can ever be happy without you; anyway I don't want you to feel that I have refused you absolutely," she

entreated. "I cannot reason clearly now. I may be influenced by the novelty of everything. I feel that it would be hard to give up my former life. I am not sure that I do not love you as you would have me, but I must return to my life in New York before I can judge wisely. Will you not trust me to return?"

"It shall be just as you wish, of course," answered Tom sadly, "but, oh, the horror of having you leave me, not knowing whether you will ever return! I cannot bear to think of it."

"Then let us not think of it," she said steadily. "Let everything be as it was before; not thinking of any change, but rejoicing in the present and in our sincere friendship."

"So be it!" replied Tom, not daring to trust himself to touch her hand again. "I will pray every day that God may give me your love. But, come now, dear, I hear your Aunt Phoebe calling. She is probably wondering what has got you."

"I fear she will change her mind about my industry," laughed Marian tremulously, as she looked down into her half-filled pail, then at the dead snake, and up again into Tom's eyes; she longed to have him take her hand again.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE next few days were employed in viewing the baby animals on the ranch, the little pigs, the calves, ducks, turkeys and geese.

"Would you ever believe little pigs could be so pretty!" exclaimed Marian in delight.

"You don't really care for those foolish things, do you?" asked Bess in surprise. "You're just acting tickled to be polite."

"No, I really do like them," said Marian. "The little turkeys are like small chickens, and they are so cunning, running after the big mother turkeys. The little geese look for all the world like diminutive tugboats."

"None of those little things are as beautiful in my eyes as these old hogs," commented Aunt Phoebe, gazing with pride upon those that had grown up under her supervision. "Look at those beautiful fat sides shake," she cried in delight. "Won't we have some good old hams and sausages? I never let the servants touch the sausage meat. I make every sausage with my own hands."

A small pickaninny was chasing the big father turkey when the gobbler suddenly turned, and, with tail outspread like a peacock's and beak wide open, advanced upon the terrified child, who ran quickly the other way, uttering shrieks of alarm. At the same time Mr. and Mrs. Goose, who were waddling together in dignified conversation, were set upon by the collie. Thrusting out their heads with a hissing sound they sent him after the flying child with yelps of pain.

"Don' you-all be skeered ob dat turkey," said Sambo rescuing his offspring. "You-all's goin' to eat up dat big bird some day."

Marian had so grown to love all the animals and the life upon the ranch that she would gladly have given up the two days' trip to Xantus, planned by her cousin ostensibly for Marian's pleasure. She became very sad whenever the idea returned to her that soon she would be leaving it all, perhaps forever. She tried to forget it and forbade the mention of her approaching departure.

"If I can hardly bear to leave them all for two days," she thought, "how can I ever bear the final separation?"

She could not altogether banish from her mind the dashing Jay, who had been the picture of meekness ever since the dewberrying episode.

"There is so much that is fine in him," she thought, "it is a pity that he cannot be a little more stable. He needs the help of a good woman."

Tom was always the same to her, a gentle, tender friend, a tower of strength; but she sometimes found herself reflecting that he lacked the very qualities that made Jay so fascinating. He held himself almost too well in hand. Jay's recent affront had been unpardonable, but it was because he loved her, and what woman could help forgiving that! His dark eyes asked forgiveness daily, but she could always feel the fire in them that kept her heart from being Tom's completely.

The boys were busy branding the young calves, which was accomplished by catching them round the neck with a lasso, then throwing them gently down and sitting on their heads while the mark was quickly made with a hot iron.

The work of breaking in the young horses had also commenced. The wild little creatures would prance about, cutting all sorts of capers before their would-be masters could mount at all. Once upon their backs the fun began in earnest for both rider and spectator. Many a time would the boys measure their length upon the soft grass; but, holding a tight grasp upon the reins,

they would spring up and remount in a twinkling.

Marian found all this vastly entertaining and was out of doors all day long.

One sweltering hot night in April, news of the greatest importance came to Jay Carruth. Wild Bill brought it to him under cover of the darkness. In spite of their efforts to aid in his escape, Joe Carruth, having gotten out of prison, had been tracked and recaptured by the vigilant Jack Packer.

"That feller is just trying to commit suicide," growled Bill as he related this to Jay.

"No, I can't stop with you," he replied to Jay's urgent invitation. "I just can't stay under shelter while Joe is in prison. Then there are too many folks watching you, anyway. We've got to work mighty carefully, and I can do better alone. Don't you worry, Sonny,—Joe'll get away again pretty soon, where they won't catch him so easy."

Two days after this midnight interview Jay and Tom were summoned to court as witnesses against Joe. The trial was a great event in Xantus. The personal attractiveness of the bold outlaw, added to his old family name, increased the interest his lawless deeds had inspired. Tom and Jay were also regarded with wondering in-

terest by the many strangers with which Xantus was crowded. Being near relatives of the prisoner, they were naturally suspected of being more anxious to assist in his escape than to bring him to justice.

The excitement rose high when it was learned that Sin Killer Jones had escaped miraculously from both shooting and drowning, and appeared again. The news that he had turned State's evidence and convicted Joe of all sorts of black deeds in order to save his own neck, only infuriated the populace all the more, and the guard around the prison had to be doubled to protect him.

"Such villains ought to be strung up right off, before they get away again," was heard on all sides.

The night of his conviction Joe sent for Tom. He could not bear to see his brother after bringing such disgrace upon his name. He begged his cousin to stand by him and protect him from the violence of the mob.

"Any death but that," he groaned.

Upon Tom's promise to protect him with his life, Joe grew calmer. "I don't want to sacrifice you, Tom," he said, "so don't let them see you want to help me. I only ask you to stand near and shoot me if they get me. It's no use to say

now that I wish I had been a better man. Everyone wishes that when he gets where I am now, and I don't know that I could have been any different if I had seen the end all before me. I believe a man lives about as his nature compels him to, unless he masters that nature early in life. I felt the longing in me always for a life of wild excitement, and I just couldn't stand a quiet, everyday kind of life like the rest of you were leading. I used to think if the Lord would only give me peace inside and make me love good things as you did, I would be perfectly happy; but when I was alone in the fields or doing my work in the house or in the pen, I felt all on fire inside and wanted to stamp and shout or curse like a madman. I hated all good men and hated the Lord for not making me like them. Most of all, I hated as well as envied you, with your pleasant, happy face and everybody loving you. The hate is all gone now, Tom, as well as the desire for excitement. Sure, I've had my fill of it!" and he laughed bitterly. "Not even envy is left, only just infinite weariness and a wonder why God wouldn't let me live and die like other men instead of putting this terrible fire in my blood, which is almost insanity."

"There are many things we cannot understand, Joe," said Tom in an unsteady voice as he

placed his hand gently on his cousin's bowed shoulders. "But we know that He who can read every thought is more merciful than the best of men."

"I sometimes feel," continued Joe, "if I had not lost my dear mother when I was a little chap and had gotten the right start I might have been a good instead of an evil man. Often in place of hatred came a love of all that was good and a great longing to be so myself and I would preach to my pals till they all laughed at me and stopped up their ears. When I was first married I did my best to settle down, for I did love Bess, and I love her still," he said, his face softening, "but she was not strong enough to help me. She roused the devil in me with her silly, flirty ways, and then she would be afraid of me. She wasn't capable of a love that could really help a man."

"Yes, and she'll have another in your place before you're cold," snarled Bill, stealing from a dark corner. "She's got one all ready waiting."

"What!" roared Joe, jumping up with blazing eyes, and sniffing the air like a war-horse. "Let her beware! I'll not be hung. I'll escape yet. Let her look to herself!"

"Time's up!" shouted the jailor coming in, and Tom was unwillingly hurried off, while

Bill stopped just long enough for a hasty whisper with the prisoner.

"Why did you say that about Bess?" demanded Tom sternly as he faced Bill outside the prison.

Bill looked down. "Tom," he said finally, "I love Joe Carruth as I never loved anyone else in all my God-forsaken career. I know that girl Bess might have saved him, and now she's just gloating over his finish."

"But you have only made his last hours miserable," replied Tom.

Bill shook his head and slouched off.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE next day Nigger Ned flew back on his Pegasus to bring the anxious people on the three ranches the news that Joe Carruth was to be hanged in two days, and the boys would remain in Xantus till after the execution; with the added intelligence that Jack Packer, the sheriff, had been found dead the night before on the steps of the Court House, with a bullet through his brain. Just when it had been done or by whom could only be conjectured, but he had evidently been dead some time when they discovered him. Wild Bill had vanished from the face of the earth.

The night before the execution was one of the few really hot nights Marian had experienced in Texas. As a rule, however hot the day, a breeze springs up at nightfall. On this particular evening not a breath of air was stirring and a gloom hung over everything. Bess and her parents had gone to bed, hoping to silence in the oblivion of sleep the gruesome thoughts they could escape in no other way. Even the boys, unable to endure the universal depression after

several ineffectual attempts at conversation, one by one slunk away to their rooms. Marian's mind was in such a state of unrest that she felt ready to expect almost any terrible encounter the possibility of which pictured itself in her fevered imagination. She even dreaded the long, low-studded living room, lighted only dimly at one end by a small lamp. She cast a half fearful glance into the dark corners, as she went to take the lamp to go to her own room.

As she passed the piano she thought a little music might calm the tension of her nerves, as it had often done before; so, setting down the lamp she seated herself at the instrument and played softly for a little time, till she had returned to a more normal frame of mind. Suddenly a slight sound behind her caused her to turn quickly.

"Why, Jay!" she said rising, "when did you get here?"

Then starting back she clutched the piano for support, as she realized that the man before her was not Jay, but that she was looking into the haggard, desperate face and wild, hunted eyes of the outlaw. Her heart beat almost to suffocation.

"Why are you here?" she whispered unable to speak aloud or cry for help.

Without replying the man caught her by the shoulders and slipped a gag into her mouth. She had a semi-realization that her hands were being tied, then knew no more till she heard her name called in agonizing tones and opened her eyes to see Tom Mayberry bending over her looking almost as wild and haggard as the escaped criminal.

"Are you all right, Miss Marian?" he gasped as he cut the cords from her wrists and helped her to rise.

"I am not hurt,—I must have fainted," she said slowly. Then, as her mind awoke, she grasped Tom's arm. "Joe Carruth was here. Where is he? We must go to Bess."

Just then Jay advanced from the window. "Tell us quickly what has happened," he said. "Joe was found missing, and I feared he would come here. Tom and I nearly killed our horses following. God grant Bess is safe."

Marian felt as if the solid earth were still reeling under her feet, and grasped Tom's arm for support as they all turned quickly toward the corridor leading to Bess's chamber.

There Jay knocked, but no sound was heard. He knocked again, then, in terror of the silence, threw his body against the door, forcing the frail lock. He entered the room alone, Marian and

Tom remaining outside in terror of some fearful tragedy. Marian could feel the beating of her heart in her ears, and a lump rose up in her throat which nearly suffocated her. She felt as if the silence had lasted for ages, when Jay finally appeared on the threshold of the room, his face white and drawn with pain, his eyes large with anguish.

The expression on his face filled them with awe.

"What have you found, Jay?" gasped Tom, for Marian's white lips refused to move.

"Joe and Bess, both dead," came the reply through parched lips, in a voice almost devoid of expression. "Take Miss Marian away, Tom, and come back to me."

At that moment footsteps were heard and Uncle Dan came down the corridor, holding a lamp in his hand and sleepily rubbing his eyes.

"What's the trouble, Jay?" he said faintly, as he saw Jay's face, and realized that something terrible had occurred.

Jay, his head erect as if to nerve himself to break the awful intelligence, half raised his hand as though to invoke the Deity and at the same time to check Uncle Dan's advance.

"The sins of the father have been visited upon the children," he said solemnly. "I shall live in

the future only to redeem the name of Carruth, and atone for the injury done to an innocent woman and her people."

"Let me go to Bess!" begged Uncle Dan frightened but uncomprehending.

Jay still barred the way. "It is too late," he said, and the old man's head drooped heavily.

"My little girl, my little girl!" he moaned. "I have nothing left to live for!" Then, rousing himself, "That hound Joe!" he began, but Tom said solemnly,

"Joe is dead also. Leave his punishment to God."

Uncle Dan groped blindly before him and Tom sprang forward and caught the lamp from his trembling hand. Then putting his arm round him, he and Marian led him tenderly away, the latter gaining strength herself as she felt there was some one who had need of her.

The poor mother, usually the stronger of the two, broke down utterly. "If I had looked after her better, I might have saved her," she repeated over and over again.

As Jay walked heavy-hearted from the house he saw a crouching figure suddenly dart from a dark corner of the piazza and disappear. He paused for a moment, then walked on.

"It was Wild Bill," he said to himself.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE next few days were terrible ones. Sorrow weighed heavily upon everyone. It was not until Bess and Joe were carried to their last resting place that any one seemed to speak above a whisper. Uncle Dan went about the ranch as usual, but Aunt Phoebe was confined to her bed, and hardly seemed to realize what was going on about her. One morning Uncle Dan drew Marian to him as they sat on the wide veranda after an early breakfast.

"Marian, my darling," he said, "the time has come for you to return home. You have been a great comfort to us and I am deeply grateful to you, but I can see that you need to get away from here. I hope sometime you will come back and be my girl in place of the one who has gone. The doctor says your Aunt Phoebe has brain fever. Mrs. Mayberry is on her way here to look after her, and Tom will stay and drive you over to Xantus. Jay and Gus have taken all the care of things up to now, and I've had nothing to do but sit round and mope; but I've made up my mind

not to be idle any longer. I'm going to get out round the ranch and keep busy. It'll be a heap better for me."

There was silence for a moment, then he added, "Mr. Osterhandt has business up North and will go on to New York with you. He's a good chap and I shall feel lots safer to have you in his charge."

"Thank you, Uncle," she said kissing him tenderly, "but I cannot bear to leave you."

"It is best so, dear," he answered. "I had a letter from your father last night saying that you must come at once."

There was a hush on the ranch outside, and a gloom inside the house which seemed only heightened by the bright sunshine. Marian packed her trunk with feverish haste, longing to be away and seated by the side of Tom, knowing that in his presence alone she would find the peace of which she was in sore need.

From the open window she could hear Jay giving orders, in tones of calm command, and could see him walking here and there with head erect and dignified bearing, more like Tom Mayberry than the old dashing Jay. He had stayed with them through all this period of trouble, directing everything with a strength of will that impelled them all to turn to him for help.

By the time Tom and his mother had arrived everything was ready and Marian took a long and tearful farewell of her uncle and dear Mrs. Mayberry.

"God bless and keep you, dear," said the older woman. "I feel sure you will come back to us sometime."

While Jay and Tom were placing her trunk upon the democrat wagon which was to take her to Xantus, she turned to bid good-by to the faithful negro servants and then to the cowboys who were out in full force to express their deep regret at parting with the girl, whose interest in the ranch life and ready sympathy in all which concerned them had won their hearts.

"You'll sure enough come back, Miss Marian?" said Tad. "We-all can't run the ranch without you."

"Come back! Come back!" shouted the others. Then she turned to Jay.

"Good-by, dear friend," he said, pressing her hands in both of his. "I hope you will come back, and when you do, you will find a different James Carruth from the one you knew before. You have many friends here," he added, "but none more willing to serve you than I."

Marian pressed his hands in return, but the tears choked her voice as she tried to thank him.

Looking into his handsome, serious face, she realized that his prophecy was being rapidly fulfilled.

"You must fix things all right with Tom on the way to the station," whispered Gus as he tucked in the dust robe, and the two drove off amid the waving of handkerchiefs and muffled good-bys, Aunt Phoebe's illness preventing any loud noise.

"You'll sure come back?" said Tom half doubtfully, after a long and troubled silence.

"I can't believe that I shall not," answered Marian, her voice trembling.

"I don't want to influence you by telling you all it means to me," pleaded Tom. "I could not if I would; but the thought of having you go out of my life altogether would break my heart. I shall go about like one in a dream till you come back to me. I shall hope you will do so, and that hope alone will keep me above ground."

"I feel now as if I could never be happy anywhere else," replied Marian, slipping her hand into his free one, "but I want to go back to New York and think things over calmly, and tell my father all about it. You may trust me to decide upon whatever is best for both of us."

"There is no best for me without you," he answered, "but I will trust you to act wisely."



“Will you not drink a cup with me?”

Then he added, "I almost wish Osterhandt weren't going up with you."

"Surely," she laughed, "you aren't afraid of him?"

He looked doubtful. "I don't know," he said, "he has a better education than I have."

"Oh, no! Only more book knowledge," she answered.

"Hold the reins a moment," he added gently, as he sprang to the ground to open a gate, and closing it again behind the wagon he climbed in, then alighted again a few rods further on and unchecked his horses to drink at the water's brink.

"This is the Colorado River," he said, his voice vibrating with emotion. "Will you not drink a cup with me? They say one who drinks of the Colorado can never leave here for long, but must come back to Texas to live and die."

"If that doesn't bring me back here, perhaps the memory of the Algerita—or a more powerful one still—" Marian hesitated, confused under his intent gaze. Silently she reached her hand out for the cup, and after drinking they went on again to Xantus.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE journey to New York seemed like a dream to Marian, though Mr. Osterhandt did his best to enliven it. Upon their arrival the young man appeared a little dazed by the noise and rush, and frankly told Marian and the friends who met her at the station that he could never have found his way about if they had not been there to advise him. He added that he was really afraid to cross the street, it had to be done so quickly. Miss Wilson, Marian's friend, gazed with delight into his boyish yet manly face, and thought his slow southern speech irresistible.

"I don't wonder you were in love with the South if the men were all like him," she whispered to Marian.

"Where is Father?" asked Marian eagerly, not noticing her friend's remark.

"Oh, we are to take you to his office; he couldn't get away," answered Miss Wilson's brother who accompanied her.

"Are you going to keep that dear fellow all to

yourself?" whispered Miss Wilson, as the two men turned to give orders about the trunks.

"Oh, no indeed! I brought him up on purpose for you," laughed Marian. "He says he's going into business here in New York."

As the party wended their way down Wall street, the enchanted Osterhandt wanted to stop at every corner. "What are you hurrying so for?" he queried. "I'm all out of breath. Heavens! What tall buildings!"

"You'll have plenty of time for sight-seeing later," laughed Marian. "I'm in a hurry to see Father."

Just then Osterhandt was nearly knocked over by some men rushing round the corner.

"You must keep your eyes open," said young Wilson impatiently.

"I suppose I do seem like a Johnny from the country," laughed Osterhandt good-naturedly.

They entered one of the tall buildings and Marian touched the electric bell for the elevator. Almost at the same moment the machine shot down, the door clanged open, and a dozen men tore out of it and rushed into the street. Osterhandt looked after them in surprise.

"Hold on a moment," he said to the operator as the party stepped in, "I want to get a box of cigarettes." The boy cast one look of silent con-

tempt at him, banged the door and shot up out of sight, leaving the astonished Osterhandt standing alone in the hall below.

Marian's father gave her a tender and affectionate greeting, then, taking out his watch he said, "I can give you only ten minutes as I am just about going to Court. I will meet you at dinner."

Marian couldn't help noting how much he resembled Uncle Dan, only the lines in her father's face were all sharp and keen, and his manner much more decisive. He gave Mr. Osterhandt, who appeared shortly after the entrance of the others, a cordial welcome to New York, and thanked him for his care of Marian.

"You are in the law, I understand," he said. "Do you want a position here in New York? Come to my office to-morrow at ten, and I can perhaps give you some assistance in that direction. Come to dinner with us to-night at seven. Now, I must say good-by to you all," and he bowed them out.

Osterhandt noted the spacious rooms lined with books, the busy clerks bustling about, and the air of activity on all sides.

"New York's the place for me," he said emphatically. "It's just what I've always dreamt it was."

Marian looked about curiously as she rode homeward; it was all familiar and dear to her, but at the bottom of her heart was a lonesome ache which she could hardly understand.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WEEKS went by, but Marian's restlessness increased instead of diminishing. The great city seemed depressing. The noise and bustle of the streets still confused her overwrought nerves. Her father was so much occupied with his ever growing practice, that she had no good opportunity for discussing the matters which filled her heart. She attended many social functions, and it seemed as if her time were spent in shopping and dressmaking to prepare for such things. It wearied and depressed her. She had lost interest in society, the stock market, the coming President, and the latest society gossip. She wanted to be on the back of a horse, with the wind blowing through her hair. She felt as if all her friends talked in whispers and walked about on tiptoe. She longed to hear a burst of hearty, uproarious laughter instead of a conventional titter, and avowed that there is more poetry than truth in Goldsmith's assertion concerning "the loud laugh that speaks the vacant mind."

The theatres, the brilliant social gatherings, the highly cultivated, beautifully-dressed people,—all that which she had felt formed her world,—now only bored her. Poor Marian! The fault lay not in that wonderful community of every sort and condition of men, but in herself.

Osterhandt, on the other hand, gave himself up to it as gleefully as a child. Finding him a clear-headed, well-informed man, Mr. Luce had given him a position in his own office and he was advancing rapidly in New York ways. He vowed that he never would leave this fascinating city for the land which beckoned so alluringly to Marian.

“How can anyone live in that sleepy old place?” he said. “New York for me, every time!”

At last Marian, who spent much time in introspection, realized fully that Texas, to her, meant Tom Mayberry, and that she loved him irrevocably.

True, there were many men in New York as noble, as attractive and far more versed in the ways of the world—her world. To join her life to his meant giving up entirely her old life, and all her former friends.

“But I love that life far better,” she replied to her friend’s expostulation. “And oh, how I long

for a whiff of that pure air! I believe a scent now of the Algerita would drive me mad!"

"No, you don't," responded Miss Wilson. "It isn't Texas that you love—it's that man there."

"Well, it's the same thing," argued the girl obstinately.

"You'll find it isn't when you wake up," remarked her friend. "Why didn't you fall in love with Osterhandt, or bring Tom Mayberry home with you?"

"Osterhandt!" said Marian scornfully. Then, seeing her friend's face flush she said gently, "Mr. Osterhandt is really a fine fellow, and Father says he'll make a great lawyer; but I don't love him, and as for bringing Tom here,—” then she stopped to imagine his strong figure in such incongruous surroundings. "No, Tom would be out of place except under the blue sky and outdoor life of Texas."

"Well, it's of no use to argue with a girl who's in love," sagely observed her friend rising to go. "You're utterly ruined for New York, and you may as well go back to Texas. Perhaps we may come out and visit you once in a while," she added with a kiss.

Marian sat as in a dream humming "I'd cross deep waters for you, my dear." What deep

waters would she not cross to find that stalwart figure on the other side!

Quite unconscious of the presence of her friend, she drew from its hiding-place an envelope from which she took a pressed white flower, and sat gazing at it absently.

"The scent is all gone now," she said half aloud, and hot tears fell on the hand that held it.

"He brought it to me from his ranch, and I wore it at the dance, on the night of the —Oh! that awful night. I knew that night, that I loved him. Why could I not have trusted my own instincts——"

"We don't do that in New York," interposed her companion with an air of superiority.

"The scent is all gone," Marian went on apparently not heeding the interruption. "I can smell it in imagination, and if I ever do in reality I believe I shall lose my mind."

"Don't get so excited Marian," her friend became authoritative as the girl grew almost hysterical. Then she laid her hand coaxingly on Marian's.

"He isn't dead you know dear, and he really loves you—why—it can be fixed up some way if you are sure——"

"Sure!"

Marian shot a glance of pity at her little friend.

"If you hadn't gone to Texas you would never have discovered your strong emotional nature. I wish I could care that much about something," she added pathetically.

At this juncture a gentle tap came at the door and the maid handed her a letter from Texas. She opened it with a thrill of foreboding. She had not heard from Tom, and her uneasiness had been increased by the suspense and lack of news. The letter was from Uncle Dan and contained the sad news of Aunt Phoebe's death.

"I want to see you and Brother George again," he wrote, "for you are all that are left to me." He purposed to leave the ranch in the hands of Gus, until either he or someone whom he should appoint would take charge of it. If Marian would consent to come down there and live, the whole property should eventually be hers.

At dinner she passed the letter over to her father with no comment.

"I would like to talk it over with you, Father, when you have time," she said faintly as he paused in his reading of the letter.

"Very well, my dear," he answered kindly, leading the way to his study.

After reading the letter and returning it to Marian he sat for a moment lost in thought; then he said, "Dan shall spend the rest of his life with me. I think I can persuade him to go abroad with me. You will go with us, of course."

"No, no, father!" Marian burst out vehemently. "I want to go back to Texas and be a ranch woman."

"What, live alone in that great house? That would be scarcely proper."

With great difficulty Marian told her father the truth, at which he looked very sober and said, after another long pause,

"I never had much faith in this romantic love, for I don't believe it ever lasts. People who are well suited in tastes and temperament and have a community of interests marry because it is the thing to do, and they grow very fond of each other, but this marrying someone in a widely different sphere of action I can't believe can bring happiness."

"Then you simply don't understand," Marian persisted patronizingly.

"Perhaps I don't, and perhaps I do. But, anyway, it is your happiness that I want. It will be very, very hard for me to give you up, but if you are really convinced that nothing else will do, then I must give my consent. But do you

realize how different his views of life are? Why, I heard Osterhandt say to-day that the southern men expected their wives to obey them in everything——”

“I want to obey him,” Marian insisted.

Her father stared in astonishment and remarked as he looked at his watch, “I guess you are really in love.” Here a servant again appeared bearing a box which emitted a strong, sweet odor. Marian became very pale. “The box is for me!” she cried, holding out a trembling hand to the astonished servant.

“So it is,” said the father examining the card with all the curiosity of a man—“and the card reads: Mr. Tom Mayberry.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE three ranches in Texas had been running with usual smoothness and regularity. The Luce Ranch, under the able administration of Gus, was fuller of life and activity than ever. The Carruth Ranch was even more changed. Jay began his work early in the morning and personally supervised everything that went on till late in the evening. Many of the old ranchmen who did not take kindly to the new régime were turned off, and new ones, more sober and industrious, took their places. By fall, the Carruth ranch had begun to rival the Luce's in beauty, thrift and prosperity. Tom, who always got the most out of his comparatively few acres, went about his duties as usual, but with little interest in his work. His mother noted with pain the patient, almost lifeless expression on his face, and his abstracted air, as if he were going about in his sleep. She knew very well that only his high devotion to duty, his love for her and his stern command of himself, kept him up.

He had written one long, tender letter to Marian, but received no reply. At first he tried to believe that she really cared for him, and that soon the hoped-for answer would come to him. Then, after many weary days of watching and waiting, his face became paler, and his eyes looked large and wistful; but his jaw was set and his lips compressed, so that no one dared speak to him about his changed appearance, much less to tease him.

The younger boys were watching Tom and Jay one day as they met and so began talking about the departed Marian.

"I see Nigger Ned gallopin' to Xantus every day or so," laughed Sid; "I expect he takes one letter and brings back another."

"Boss says he's sure goin' to give Miss Marian the ranch," chimed in Hugh.

Sundry curious glances rested on Tom's pale face as he made no remark, and a hush fell on the little group, broken by Jay's command for them to scatter and attend to business, giving definite orders to each.

The two young men being left alone, Jay threw his arm in sympathy over Tom's shoulder, who for a moment broke down in uncontrollable grief.

"How could any woman treat a man so, Jay?" he finally asked, as he grew calmer. "She was

only playing with me all the time, and I will not think of her any more."

"You're wrong there, Tom," replied Jay earnestly. "I am sure Miss Marian loves you with a love as great as your own. There may be many reasons why you have not heard from her. I am sure she is worthy of greater trust than you are giving her. Why! Think how easily a letter can go astray, when any chance horseman can fetch and carry the mail. You well know there are men who would gladly do you an ill turn, for no better reason than that you are on the side of law and order."

"You give me fresh hope, Jay," replied Tom, raising his head. "How good you are to me! I hardly dare write to her again, though, for if she didn't answer it—" he paused and gave his cousin an eloquent look. "Then"—he went on hesitatingly—"I did send her a box of Algerita blossoms, you know how she loved them. Now I can't do any more, can I? To write again——"

"You needn't write, you shall go to her," answered Jay with decision.

"How can I?" asked Tom, startled. "Where is the money to come from?"

"From me."

"No, Jay, I won't take the money you've worked so hard for. The trip might be all in

vain. Then the faint hope I'm clinging to would be gone forever, and your money also. If I were alone in the world, with no one dependent upon me, it would be different. I would go then without a moment's hesitation," he added slowly, "but I have mother and Walt to consider." Then, holding out his hand, he said, "No, Jay, it can't be; but I shall never forget your offer nor your sympathy."

Jay, taking the outstretched hand, held the man firmly as he was about to mount his horse once more.

"You must go, Tom," he said. "I don't want to hear another word about the money. It would take a great load from my heart and my conscience if I could do that much for you and Miss Marian, for I am sure it means as much to her as to you. I would feel that I was paying part of the awful debt I owe to the Luce family. Then, Tom, there's going to be an added tie between us, that will bind us still nearer together."

Tom surveyed him in uncomprehending surprise.

"Then you haven't seen Hetty lately?" said Jay in some confusion. "I haven't asked you if you were willing, Tom."

"Willing! I'm perfectly delighted!" cried Tom giving his friend's hand a hearty clasp. "I

know you'll be happy, Jay. She's a dear little girl."

"That she is," said Jay emphatically.

Tom regarded his cousin intently. How completely the old Jay had vanished he had not realized until at that moment he scanned the drawn, sad face. How gladly just then would he have seen the old careless expression or have listened to his light laugh or some flippant remark. "We need the old Jay back," he thought to himself; then added aloud with deep concern,

"Did you really love Miss Marian, Jay?"

Jay gazed across the prairie. "Don't ask me," he answered sadly. "That is all over now, and I think I can be happy in a way and make Hetty happy.

"I used to watch Marian, too," he added after a pause, "and I knew then better than she knew herself that it was you she loved. But I wouldn't believe it then, nor stand for it—but no more about me. You must start to-morrow, and—take my word for it—you'll find Miss Marian as glad to see you as you'll be to see her. I'll oversee your ranch myself. You shall draw a check for five hundred in my name—I'll call it a loan if you like," as Tom protested, "but just now your trip is the only thing to be considered."

"I'll go," answered Tom with decision, "and

I'll start to-morrow morning, sure;" and pressing Jay's hand again he sprang into the saddle and galloped off with his head erect.

"He's his old self once more. Glory hallelujah!" shouted Jay exultingly. "I don't know when I've felt so good before," and he in turn started off on a high lope.

"What's up, Jay?" shouted Harry, coming towards him apparently a little alarmed.

"I feel like I had been having a good drink," said Jay, his eyes sparkling. "I want to sing and hug somebody."

"Get out!" yelled the boy, dodging a frantic gesture in his direction.

"Harry," said Jay kindly, "we've never thought much about you in all this trouble. I know you have suffered too, my boy, and I want you to be as happy as I am to-day. What can I do for you?"

"Nothing, Boss," said Harry sadly. "Nothing'll help me but time and hard work."

"You've been my most faithful worker ever since you first came to me," went on Jay, "and I mean to make it worth your while to stay with me."

"I have always felt it worth while," answered Harry, "and I'm ready at all times to do all that's expected of me and a little more."

"I know it, lad. Are you happier here, where you've had all your trouble than you would be somewhere else?" questioned Jay kindly.

"Yes, I'd rather stay here than go anywhere else in the wide world. Folks differ about that, I suppose," he added pensively.

"Well," answered Jay, "Tom's going on to New York, while I run his ranch. As you are my best man, I will give you full charge of mine till Tom returns. After that you shall be overseer and take full control in my absence. I'll give you some land, too, and a certain per cent of all we make, besides your regular pay."

Harry held out his hand, but could find no words with which to thank him, and Jay galloped off feeling happier than he had felt since his brother's death.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

EARLY THE next morning Jay arrived at the Mayberry ranch to assist Tom in his preparations for departure, and to receive his final instructions as to the management of affairs in his absence.

He was received at the door by Mrs. Mayberry, whose pale face and haggard look took Jay by surprise.

"Have you found him?" she asked breathlessly.

"Found who? I came out to help Tom get off to Xantus," he said. His bright, happy face turned to one of despair as she said,

"Tom's lost. Oh, didn't we have trouble enough without this!" she cried with tears running down her face. "Tom told me, dear Jay, of the conversation between you, and of your generous offer. I gladly gave my consent, and he left me to go over to the second pasture to finish some work there, saying he would be back in time for supper. When it got to be ten o'clock and he didn't come, Walter and Tad went out to search

for him, and they haven't come back yet. You can imagine the night I've spent, all alone here," and the poor woman sank down on the doorstep, too worn out to say more, but feeling glad that someone was there to think for her.

"I'll go and hunt for him at once. I'm sure Tom's all right; at the worst it's only a sprained ankle, or something of that sort," he said reassuringly.

"But think of my poor boy lying out all night with a broken arm or leg!" sobbed the unhappy mother. "Perhaps he is dead. Who knows?"

"Now you just go in and get some nice hot coffee ready for him, and some of your grand hot cakes," urged Jay, bracing himself to appear lighthearted and hopeful, and concealing the fear that tugged at his heart. He realized that the only way to keep up the courage of a woman like Mrs. Mayberry was to get her interested in doing something for somebody else.

"I'll take a drink of coffee with you," he added, "and eat something if you will do so too. We must keep up our strength, for Tom may need it. Then I will go and search for him, but I have little doubt he is on his way home this very minute; and by the time you are ready for him he will be here, hungry as a wolf. Tom's all right. He hasn't an enemy in the world."

Mrs. Mayberry, catching his hopeful spirit, bustled into the kitchen and ordered the fire built at once. The coffee was all ready, when the dull thud of horses' feet was heard outside, and the two boys were seen approaching very slowly, leading between them a third, lying prostrate upon his horse and securely tied.

"He's alive, mother!" called out Walter as her anxious face appeared at the window, "and not badly hurt, either; only a little light-headed—aren't you, old boy?" he added tenderly as Jay took the horse's head and he untied the heavy ropes which held his brother upon the horse. Then the three young men lifted him gently and bore him into the house.

"Here's some nice hot coffee, dear," said the mother, bending over him and longing for a sign of recognition.

Tom seized the cup, and drank its contents eagerly.

"Where's Marian?" he asked, looking round the room. "She said she'd be here to-day, when I saw her last night. If she doesn't come, I don't want to live. Mother's married again and Walter's gone to college and I'm all alone, all alone. If she doesn't come to-day, I may as well die."

The mother went quietly to work making prep-

arations for his comfort, while the boys watched in helpless anxiety Tom's wild eyes and the brilliant red spot on each cheek.

All day long he raved and called for Marian, occasionally threatening to kill himself. Two of the boys stayed with him constantly, and his mother tried in every way to allay the fever; but, although there seemed to be no real injury, he grew worse instead of better.

"To-morrow morning early I will go to Xantus, get a doctor and telegraph to Miss Marian," said Jay, who had hardly left Tom's side.

"If we could only get Marian we wouldn't need a doctor," answered Mrs. Mayberry. "I am convinced that the longing to see her has turned his brain." Then she added slowly, "Your faith in her keeps up my own belief. She really did seem to care for him, didn't she?"

"She did and she does," replied Jay confidently. "She'll come back here, you may be sure."

The next evening Jay arrived at Xantus just in time to see the train pull up at the station. Knowing that he could not send his telegram until the mail arriving on that train had been distributed, and all the freight articles attended to, he sat impatiently on his horse watching with little interest as the great head-light of the loco-

motive drew nearer and nearer from the murky distance. The heavy engine stopped, with a jangle of cars knocking together, and the passengers began to alight. The mail-bag was thrown out, then came the trunks and the freight boxes.

As Jay had seen the little bright spot of light appear in the far distance he had only felt annoyed that the approaching train would delay his message. He meant to return to the ranch as soon as his errand was over, without even taking an hour's sleep, tired as he was. He gave a little shiver as the first cold Norther of the fall swept over the plain, but thought of it as an added help to getting back quickly.

As he sat there, however, watching the passengers in the dim light, a sudden fancy came to his mind that perhaps Marian was among them. It filled him with a strange exultation.

"I will imagine it, anyway," he said to himself as he straightened up in the saddle. "It will make the time pass more quickly."

The engine snorted and puffed, then rolled into the engine house, while his horse capered about in true bronco fashion. As soon as he had quieted the animal he again bent forward, eagerly scanning the passengers.

"There is sure enough a lady coming," and he

laughed almost hysterically as he saw a tall, square-shouldered girl in a blue tailor-made suit, who was being assisted by the conductor, the brakeman and two male passengers. The girl seemed slighter than Marian, but her face was hidden by the large blue felt hat she wore.

Jay waited breathlessly for her to lift her head. When she did so, he found it was indeed Marian.

"Why, Jay!" she cried joyously. "How did you happen to come? Oh, how glad I am to see you!"

As she rushed forward, Jay sprang to the ground and seized both her extended hands.

"Where is Tom?" she said, wistfully looking round. "Isn't he with you?" Her face fell as he shook his head unable to answer her for the moment. "I just had to come," she continued, shaken out of her usual reserve. "It was just as Tom said; no other place can ever seem like home to me again."

"Dear girl," said Jay finding his voice at last, "you have saved his life by coming just now; he is at home. He had a bad fall from his horse, was out in the field all night, and is delirious. He calls for you continually. He is not seriously hurt, I assure you," he added as he noticed her anxious face, out of which the light had faded.

"I will tell you all about it, and everything else as we ride along."

"Can't we go to-night?" broke in Marian excitedly. "I'm not a bit tired, and couldn't sleep anyway."

"If you think you could stand it—" he said doubtfully.

"I know I can. I'll rest when I get there," she urged.

"Very well. Get up behind me and I will leave you at the hotel for a bite to eat, while I go to the stable for two fast horses."

"It is a very different man, Miss Marian," he added as he helped her into the saddle, "who gives you this invitation from the one who gave it first over a year ago."

"Much has happened in one short year to change us all," she answered as she timidly stole one arm around Jay for support.

On their homeward journey Tom's story was quickly told and then Jay gave her the rest of the news.

"Your Uncle Dan is going to send Walter to college," he said. "He's always wanted to go."

"That's good!" she answered. "And how are all the other boys?"

"All well and all working on the ranch as usual. Gus is so dignified you'll hardly know

him. He runs the ranch a heap better'n Boss ever did. Hugh has found a girl at last—bless the dear boy! Tad, Doc and Sid are growing to be a credit to us. Harry has changed most. His trouble has made a man of him. He's very quiet, but will come out all right in time."

"And Wild Bill?"

"Bill was waiting outside the night Joe and Bess died."

Jay was silent for a moment, then said gravely, "Neither Bill nor Joe had planned that Joe should die. Joe meant to kill Bess, then get their treasures which were hidden in the old Viles' house, and go with it all to South America. Bill told me about it afterwards. He had planned it all, but Joe,—” and his voice choked.

"Why was Bill so bent on killing Bess?" asked Marian after a little.

"For two reasons. First, they hated each other. Bess felt that Bill was Joe's worst influence. She knew, too, that Bill would report to Joe all her little peccadilloes, frivolities, and flirtations. Then Bill was jealous of anyone who shared the love of his idol, for, bad as Bill was, he loved Joe with a love that amounted to idolatry."

"He always reminded me of Hagan in the 'Niebelungen Ring,'" said Marian pensively;

and, looking at her with a puzzled expression, Jay went on,

"Then Bill had other reasons for wanting Bess out of the way. He was suspected of various crimes, but no one could ever get proof against him. Bess was the only one living, except Joe, of course, who had ever really seen Bill kill a man. The poor girl had once been a witness of a crime in which her husband and Bill both took a hand, and this knowledge she held over Bill's head."

"Do you think he murdered the sheriff who went with him to find Joe?"

"Well, it was either Bill or Sin Killer Jones; but I'm dead sure he shot Jack Packer, and it was his influence that egged Joe on to kill Bess, by working on his jealousy. After Joe had really killed Bess he probably felt so badly that he just turned and shot himself to end it all; and when Bill discovered that he was dead,—and it didn't take him long—he just galloped off. As he told me afterward, he only wanted to live long enough to kill Jones, and he knew just where to find him. He was there at the Viles' house just as Bill expected, toting off Joe's treasure, all by himself. Bill shot him and left him there, then brought all the money up to me. He got there one dark night, and oh, how the poor fellow



Wild Bill.

looked! He was simply exhausted, almost starved, and just grieving himself to death. The devil himself couldn't help pitying him. He said, 'You'll find me dead at the Viles' house where Joe'n I've been together so many times. To-morrow morning, Boss! And for the love of God, bury me beside Joe.' It was in vain I tried to keep him with me. He wouldn't eat a mouthful, nor stop to rest. He wouldn't even shake my hand,—for I couldn't help offering it, I pitied him so—but just walked off in the darkness, all bent over like an old man, his long hair hanging over his face as if it were a wild animal's. I found him dead the next morning, though there was no mark on him. His eyes were staring upward, and I closed them, and then Harry and I just put him in a pine box and buried him in the little graveyard by the side of Joe. We both cried over him and begged the Lord to forgive him—and us."

There was a long silence, then Jay added, "I didn't know what to do with the money. I wouldn't have kept it myself for the world. I have been suspected, perhaps, of being in league with the outlaws, but God knows the only thing I ever did was to shelter my brother at times, and help him to escape. Who wouldn't have done that? Finally, I hit upon a plan. I remembered

how Joe always loved old Brother Butler, how poor the man was, how he had labored with us all and gone without everything for the sake of others, and I thought I'd take the money to him as a present, not telling him where it came from; and I did. He seemed to suspect, however, and he wormed it all out of me. Then he and I worked like beavers, advertising and hunting up the rightful owners. They bobbed up from all directions you may be sure, some real and some imposters. We did the best we could to sift their claims, and we soon got rid of the money. Good old Butler wouldn't take a cent, even to pay him for his time and trouble, so he was really poorer than ever."

"He is truly a good man," said Marian, "I'm sorry I ever called him narrow."

"We're sort of looking after him now," went on Jay. "You can't keep him from working, but we give him all he can eat, and he's getting a little more flesh on his bones."

"Who's the new sheriff?"

"You'd never guess."

"Is it Hyslop?"

"Oh, no! He's up for governor and sure to be elected. We're hand in glove with the celebrities. He'll sure come to your wedding. He says you're

the bravest girl he ever knew. I saw him in Athens a week or two ago."

"Did you see Aunt Kate?"

"Oh, yes. She asked for you. So did the college president, and a dozen others."

"Well, but you didn't tell me the name of the new sheriff."

Jay chuckled. "Giles Jakes," he finally said.

"What!" gasped Marian. "The only one left of the gang! The man who got third prize in the roping! The man who escaped the night they captured—" Marian paused, Jay answered sadly.

"Yes! He was the only one left of the gang. He'd learned his lesson, and wasn't a bad sort after the others were gone. Then there was no one else just then willing to take the job. It was like a through ticket to the next world. They reasoned that Jakes was a smart fellow, that it takes a thief to catch a thief, and would be just the man for 'em. He was in prison at the time, so they just pardoned him out and handed over the keys of the jail to him."

A long pause followed, in which both were busy with their own thoughts. Then Jay said roguishly, "What have you done with Osterhandt?"

"Oh, I left him in New York under the care

of my dearest girl friend. You know he is practising law in Father's office."

"No! Is he?"

"Yes! Father quite admires him."

Jay looked at her quizzically.

"Why wouldn't it have been better for you to have accepted him? He's more what you have been used to."

Marian tilted her chin saucily. "Why don't we all do as other people think best for us? But Mr. Osterhandt is interested in another quarter. He told me just before I left New York that he liked the independent ways of the New York women, and that he was quite willing to let his wife manage him."

"Well, he has changed his views some," Jay commented, with a chuckle; then he asked, "has he found someone who is willing to do it?"

"Yes willing and quite capable."

"Poor Charles, I'm glad, after all, I didn't go to New York. I might have gotten into some such net, as it is—" and Jay paused.

"I believe you are engaged!" cried Marian with a woman's ready intuition.

"Yes, and to a girl who is willing to obey me in everything."

"Just as I am willing to obey Tom," Marian interpolated sentimentally.

"These people in love can't think of anyone but themselves," Jay cogitated discontentedly; but he brightened up when Marian, changing the subject, questioned him about his own affairs.

"Do I know the girl?"

"Yes."

"It is your cousin Hetty."

"How did you guess?"

"I saw that she was very fond of you, and love begets love, you know."

"I thought if I couldn't get the girl I loved, I'd be happy with one who loved me. And I mean to make her happy, too."

"You love her too, don't you?"

"Of course I do.—But, Marian, why didn't you answer Tom's letter?"

Jay felt rather than saw Marian's gaze——

"So he did write to me!" she returned after a moment's pause—"I never received any letter from him, and I was almost wild! The box of Algerita blossoms was the finishing touch. I could not write and thank him, for I could not wait for his answer, I had a horrible presentiment that I was about to lose him,—not through his lack of faith, but through some calamity—perhaps death—I told Father that I must and should leave at once—and he was so worried

about my state of mind that he packed me off on the next train.

"He couldn't get anyone to go with me, so he told the porters and conductor to have an eye on me——"

"I knew it! and I told Tom so!" Jay muttered.

Early the next day Mrs. Mayberry sat alone in her little parlor, looking sadly out at the window. Tom was asleep at last, and the fever had abated. She was straining her eyes for a sight of Jay returning with the doctor.

"They've come, and right on time," she cried rising hastily as she saw the two approaching on horseback. She went quickly to the door to meet them. To her surprise she saw as they drew nearer, that one of them was a woman. "Can it possibly be Marian?" she asked herself. Yes, it really was, and she came forward to greet her with a heart full of joy.

The two women embraced each other with tears and kisses and Jay felt his own eyes fill in sympathy.

"How is Tom?" he asked anxiously.

"He is asleep and his fever has left. You have brought the right doctor and he will get well immediately. Come right in—but wait in the hall till I see if he is awake."

She opened the door softly, then turned and beckoned to them with a smile. Tom had been awakened by the noise of their arrival and was sitting up in bed eagerly watching the door. Marian went straight to him, and put her vigorous young arms about him, pressing his head against her breast with a tender movement.

"Come, Jay, and help me bring in the breakfast," said Mrs. Mayberry, "you-all must be hungry after riding all night," and she shut the door gently upon the lovers.

"What a glorious old world this is," cried Jay as he bore in the steaming coffee-pot.

"They say folks in love are never hungry, but I'm a living example to the contrary——"

"So you are really in love!" Marian queried, regarding him quizzically—perhaps a very little piqued, for Marian was but human.

"*Indeed* I am," Jay answered simply, and blushing very red; Marian smiled at him well-pleased, and then hid her head on Tom's shoulder, as he drew her very close to him.

Mrs. Mayberry looked from one to another with perfect content, and Walter gazed upon the scene with an expression of beatitude.

"I believe if it hadn't been for Jay I wouldn't have kept up my courage to live till you got

here,"—Tom began,—but Jay protested vehemently.

"If you think you had a hard time winning me, Tom," said Marian in a muffled voice, "now that you have me, you shall never have a moment's trouble that I can ever prevent. I mean to be your companion and your help-mate in the best sense of the word."

Tom's eyes filled with tears. He could not speak. He felt almost afraid in the presence of his great happiness. But he felt the strength to meet all its responsibilities, the determination to do all his duty and more for her sake, and in gratitude to Him who had given him this great love.

As he drew her more closely to him, Marian knew all that he wished to say.

The silence was broken at last by Jay who exclaimed in the extravagant language of his rich southern nature,

"I wish we could all live a million years, just as things are now!"

THE END.

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CIRCULATION DEPARTMENT
202 Main Library

LOAN PERIOD 1 HOME USE	2	3
4	5	6

ALL BOOKS MAY BE RECALLED AFTER 7 DAYS

1-month loans may be renewed by calling 642-3405

6-month loans may be recharged by bringing books to Circulation Desk

Renewals and recharges may be made 4 days prior to due date

DUE AS STAMPED BELOW

INTERLIBRARY LOAN

JAN 13 1978

UNIV. OF CALIF., BERK.

REC. ILL MAR 13 1978

NOV 25 1978

REC. CIR. OCT 30 '78

SENT ON ILL

NOV 28 2001

U. C. BERKELEY

FORM NO. DD 6, 40m 10'77

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY
BERKELEY, CA 94720

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